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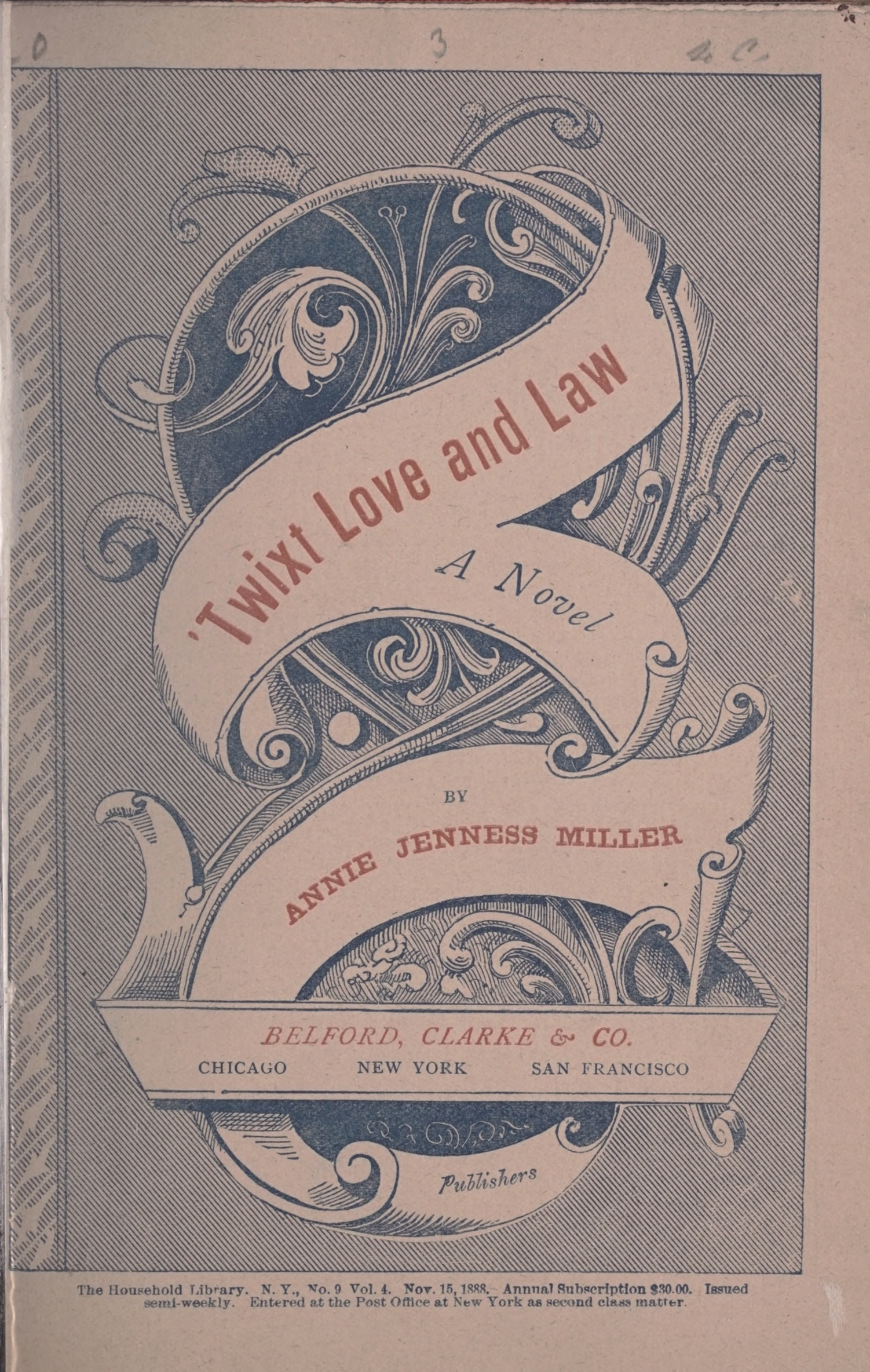

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'TWIXT LOVE AND LAW

'TWIXT LOVE AND LAW

A Novel

BY

ANNIE JENNESS MILLER
EDITOR OF "DRESS"

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'TWIXT LOVE AND LAW.

CHAPTER I.

"By the way, Miss Blaine, have you read—"

"Don't, Mr. Derwent, I beg," implored the girl, "I have not read the latest novel, nor the morning paper."

"Caught again, Teddy! The astonishing faculty which you have for putting your foot into things amounts to genius," said provoking Burt Sloane. "Really, one would not expect even you, my boy, to be so obtuse, when everybody knows that Miss Blaine is a sceptic concerning all things."

"But I didn't," complained Teddy. "I am never given the chance. The facts are—"

"That you're a good fellow, Teddy, but slow."

"But I am not supposed to know what Miss Blaine does not approve unless she tells me," protested the young man; "and beside, everybody reads the latest novel,"—appealing to her.

"Yes, I suppose so," admitted Margaret Blaine, ready to drop the subject because she felt that Yandell was waiting for her answer, and anticipating an argument between herself and the others.

"But why should you not read novels, Miss Blaine?" urged Teddy. "I can understand about the newspaper, but there are novels orthodox as the creeds."

Margaret was conscious of a pair of dark, searching, indescribable eyes.

"Nonsense, Mr. Derwent," she said, "I am a wretched heretic. Mr. Sloane has just given you a composite of my virtues. Beside," playfully rebuking his curiosity, "what does it matter whether one person or another turns off the highway of popular opinion while the crowd remains?"

"Of course it does not matter about everybody," replied the honest youth, "but you are

different; one always expects you to have opinions worth hearing."

The others laughed.

"Again, Teddy," groaned Burt Sloane.

But Margaret answered gently, knowing that the boy was honestly attached to her, and meant a compliment.

"I have opinions, certainly, Teddy, but they are of little consequence."

She had called him by his name, feeling that to do so would take the sting out of Burt Sloane's raillery. Nevertheless, she was annoyed that Yandell should think it a momentary coquetry on her part; it nettled her.

"Everything that you think and do is of consequence," said the grateful Teddy, his voice mellowed by the first passion of his life, which he could not disguise when she was kind to him.

"You are too generous;" laughed Margaret, "but I will not allow you to flatter me into a crime against the prejudices of my friends."

"Then let us have it out alone in the gar-

den. Come, you cannot refuse to cure my dense ignorance; it is a matter of human charity."

He took a step nearer, careless of the others in his anxiety that she should walk with him through the cool, shadowy paths, where the dewy breath of the young morning still rested in sun-kissed iridescence upon the living green.

For an instant doubt held her prisoner; then moved by a swift impulse she slipped her slender, palpitating hand through his arm, saying gaily:

"So be it, since you are generous enough to spare the others."

Her eyes met Yandell's, and she thought there was a touch of disappointment in their depths; the next instant, she was sure that it was rebuke; but she was committed to the moment, and with the least perceptible hauteur arching her slender throat, she went off with the enraptured boy, who had forgotten everything except her thrilling touch upon his arm.

And why should one not suspect her of

being a coquette—a woman of twenty-eight, who knew the world and the ways of men too well not to be aware that a tête-à-tête with Theodore Derwent at this moment, although he was five years her junior, was a direct invitation to speak the emotion which dominated him.

But she was more sincere than any of them, Yandell excepted, gave her credit for, and they were no sooner out of sight than she withdrew her hand from Derwent's arm, and said abruptly but not unkindly :

"Teddy, you're a foolish boy; you make the others laugh at you, and I am sorry for it."

"I do not care for the others," replied the impulsive fellow; "I am lost in you!"

"But that is absurd," she hurried on. "I am five calendar years older than you, and at least twenty years older in experience; I have gray hairs, genuine ones; anything between us would be out of the question; I am too old, if there were no other reason."

"You are perpetual youth to me, Margaret," declared the passionate fellow.

"What do I care for years? I defy them! one or fifty against an eternity of love with you."

She retreated a step as he advanced, and put up her open hands between them to ward off his touch.

"Do not be foolish, Teddy, and spoil a friendship," she said, gravely. "I am really fond of you in a way, but when you love me like that it is not reasonable."

"But you know that it is the only way that I ever shall love you," he said, facing her with dilated nostrils, like a fine animal at bay.

"So it seems to you now; but in time you would hate me, and with just cause: besides, I could not feel anything for you except kindness—it seems insipid to even think of loving a man younger than myself; the feeling does not come."

"That does not prove that it never would come; Margaret, Margaret, trust me; I will make you love me."

He stretched forth his strong, athletic arms entreatingly.

She shook her head.

"It is useless, Teddy. I do not want to

hurt you; but you absolutely have not the power to touch my life."

"You can never know unless you let me try," he said, a little desperately, with an irresistible movement toward her.

She clasped her hands together like one nerving for a struggle.

"Don't make me cruel to you," she pleaded, almost piteously; "don't, I pray you. I am thinking more of you than of myself. I am naturally a selfish woman, and there have been times when I could have done this wrong you ask, just to be taken out of myself."

"It would not be a wrong, Margaret," he urged, tumultuously, the wild hope which her words inspired driving him on. "Give yourself to me, and if I fail to win your love, possession will be enough."

It never occurred to him that her happiness as well as his own was at stake; the woman's side of the question never does appeal to a man at such a time. But she had no thought of yielding.

"It is impossible—absolutely and forever,"

she said, sorrowfully. "To say more will be cruel to us both. Do, Teddy, go away—back to your ship, I beg you."

"Then I am rejected," he groaned.

"No," hastily interposed Margaret, "do not say that; you have not proposed,—I have warned you before the folly was committed."

"Then, by heaven! I will compel you to reject me," he said, vehemently, beside himself with pain.

"Teddy, Teddy," she remonstrated, in a voice of deep reproach, "why will you not let me save you from yourself? who knows how much I wish to do it?"

He laughed bitterly: "Why should you care?"

"Because I know the misery of it."

"You, Margaret!" Amazement had sobered him instantly. She was very pale, and he saw that she was struggling for composure.

"Yes, I," she whispered under her breath, glancing around feverishly, as if in fear lest the very trees and shrubs, the sighing breeze and singing birds, should hear and repeat her confession.

A great silence fell between them.

"What an infernal brute I must seem to you, Margaret," he said at length, despairingly; "you will never forgive me after this."

"Hush, Teddy, you could not know," she whispered, gently laying her hand upon his lips, as a mother might have done.

He pressed his own hand over hers to keep it there, and fell to kissing the open palm.

She did not rebuke the caress; with a sigh of human longing her empty heart yielded to the momentary sweetness of his glowing vital sympathy. When the emotion had spent itself, their eyes met.

"You could not tell me about it?" he ventured, nervously.

"No," sadly.

"Is it death?"

"Worse than that."

"Worse?"

"Yes, more hopeless."

He looked at her dumbly. What could be worse than death? She answered his unspoken question with pale lips:

"To know that one must breathe and

move and speak through a dead self forever; to be always yearning, yearning, for the love with which all the rest of nature is bursting! To see the sun shine—and not feel its warmth! to everywhere hear the rich voice of passion, and know that its fulness mocks the desolation of one's own heart! to be always and everywhere starved! starved! starved!" Her voice had risen to a wail. "Oh! how cruel it is!"

She shivered in the clutch of her despair, and moaning, threw herself face downward upon the bosom of Mother Earth.

He was beside her in a moment, saying simply, as children say it when their tender hearts are touched with the evidence of a sorrow which they cannot understand:

"I love you, I love you, I love you!"

It was all that he could say, while the tempest raged and swelled within her; but when the last fitful gust of passion had abated, when the dry sobs shook and sighed and hushed, he reached down a pair of strong arms to raise and hold her against his breast. He was

no longer thinking of himself, but only of comforting her.

She put her hands to his shoulders after a while, and pushed herself away from him feebly.

"Thank you; I think that I will rest."

"In the house?"

"No, no, not yet! there," pointing to a vine-embowered seat. "The others must not know."

"No, they must not know," he repeated, mechanically.

When she was seated as she had desired, he said, divining her wish:

"Perhaps you would rather that I should go away."

She looked at him wistfully.

"It would be better."

"Forever?" his voice was growing tense.

She nodded dumbly.

"You do not need me?"

"No," she whispered.

"If you should?"

She answered him mutely with a gesture.

"I am going," he said, and still lingered.

"There is nothing else to be done."

"Nothing?"

"No."

"Nothing, Margaret?"

"Nothing."

"I could not make you—forget?"

"No."

"If I were your slave—if every hour of my life were given to thoughts of you—you only! if your happiness were my prayer morning, noon, and night, forever?" he pleaded, with blanching face.

"I could not forget through all eternity."

"It is strange that both of our lives should be that way," he said, in a strangled voice.

"It is strange," she replied, piteously.

"Good-bye, Margaret."

"Good-bye."

"I am going."

"I know it, Teddy."

"Not to return."

"No, there will be nothing to return for."

She sat with pathetic hands clasping each other, mute and tearless, listening while his footstep grew fainter and fainter in the dis-

tance; then lifting her face, full of sensitive pain, to the sunshine which struggled through the interlacing branches of the trees, and the shadowy green of the creeping trumpet vine above her head, she shivered in the warm embrace.

"Poor boy! poor, unhappy boy!" she said.

CHAPTER II.

No more genial host than Colonel Conant could be desired. He was a man of noble bearing, of wide travel and general culture, but his most distinguished characteristic was the happy faculty which he had for surrounding himself with people who were equally delightful. Indeed, it was the colonel's proud boast, his one pardonable vanity, that neither pedants nor fools partook his hospitality.

"They are equally bad, my dear fellow," he said, "the man who indulges verbal hieroglyphics, and the empty-pated rattler; we can't abide either species down at Glenmere. We don't pretend down there; we are simply a set of pretty decent people in the main, who are after all the happiness there is in life, when it is taken under clear skies, with wind and weather favoring."

And that was certainly the atmosphere of

the place. One fortunate enough to secure the colonel's invitation came under the influence of gracious and refining forces the moment that the massive iron gates swung welcomingly upon their great hinges, between the carved stone posts.

Within this charming spot, conventional boredom was forbidden as a misdemeanor, and men and women were expected to show up themselves; and the colonel's marvellous tact lay in the fact that he was rarely deceived in the character of a guest.

With few breaks in his triumphant reign, the little god Pleasure ruled the spirit of the great house from the opening of the guest season in May, until the last autumnal days, when falling leaves and whistling winds covered the bier and chanted the dirge of departing summer glories.

Mehitable, the bachelor colonel's old-fashioned sister, presided over the house, lending added dignity to every occasion by her gentle manners and crown of snowy hair, framing a face of benevolent virtue. The war of the rebellion had left Mrs. Douglas a childless

widow, and her life's joy had been found in administering to that of others.

Margaret Blaine was Mehitable's ward, and the daughter of her husband's only sister, who, married to a man unworthy, and early overwhelmed with disappointments, had long since closed her eyes in the sweet forgetfulness of the dreamless sleep. It will be seen, therefore, that Margaret had no claim of blood relationship upon the tender love which the colonel and Mrs. Douglas bestowed.

Strangers always wondered to hear the girl call the sweet-faced old lady "Mother Hetty," but so it had been from her babyhood, and so it would always be between them. Probably the least disappointing emotion of all Margaret's life was this one toward Mother Hetty, for the girl was instinctively grateful for the unselfishness that had surrounded all her years with maternal solicitude and forethought; and she was too keen a psychologist not to know that Mehitable's devotion was the result of a generous resolve to shield her from orphan desolation, rather than the expression of the mighty mother passion which wraps

and enfolds with irresistible and deathless tenderness the being whose life has been drawn from her own veins.

Certainly it was a wonderful piece of good luck that befell the child; but it was greater good fortune to the budding woman to enjoy the social protection and advantages which the colonel's home afforded her; for Margaret's father devoted no thought or care to her, not even the money necessary for her support and education after her mother's death; thinking only of himself and his own reckless and expensive pleasures. But Margaret was never allowed to know that she was the child of such far-reaching kindness and generosity, until long years had passed. When she was of age to enquire into her pecuniary circumstances, it could not be helped, shrewdly as the colonel and Mehitable tried to avoid the subject.

The knowledge of her dependence nearly overwhelmed the proud girl, and she passionately resisted it, declaring that she would work or starve rather than burden them longer.

"I cannot bear it, mother Hetty, I cannot!" was her wild declaration, fraught with the full poignancy of the belief that she had been forced upon them by circumstances. But when she saw that her wilful and rebellious spirit nearly broke the dear old lady's heart, with an intolerable pang for her ingratitude, Margaret settled back again into her former place.

Her sensitive soul was nevertheless stung almost beyond endurance by the shameful neglect of her father, for whom she sought desperately and stealthily, until she got traces of him away off in Australia. She wrote to him there, letters intense and reproachful—letters which led in the end to his sending her a small yearly pittance, a sum quite insufficient for the bare necessities, a sum which, by the way, she rejected later on with impassioned scorn, preferring (when she reasoned about it) the gifts which the gods gave freely, to the grudging tribute of an unloving and unnatural parent.

Such circumctances, together with her natural disposition, made of Margaret a some-

what restless and discontented woman at twenty-five ; when, by a strange circumstance of fate, her father died, leaving her an almost limitless fortune, the result of very recent speculative and mining ventures in the Australian Colonies.

This fortune was with Margaret the signal for plunging into all sorts of wild and extravagant philanthropies ; for taking up, one after another, every "ism" of the day ; for devoting herself to impractical schemes for ridding the world of orphans, and it might be of children altogether. She rushed on from one thing to another, through asylums, through hospitals, through prisons, into reforms of every conceivable sort, kind, and description. From philanthropy and philosophy she leaped to the high places of government, and dove down into social conditions and conditions of society, growing more erratic, more unstable, and more bewildered at each turn ; until she suddenly brought up before the certainty that everything leads to nothing in particular, except it may be to a better understanding of "What fools we mortals be." And there she

remained—a woman of more or less actual experience, but somewhat acquainted with the external phases of nearly every condition of life; a woman who had read a little of almost everything, drawn hasty conclusions about other things, and finally admitted to herself that she had been cruelly, cruelly outwitted in her efforts to find perfect contentment by rushing hither and yon after it. And the day came when she tore the mask from the hidden face of Truth with sudden and ruthless hands, involuntarily accusing her own cringing heart.

"Love! love! love! that is what you want, Margaret Blaine," she said, with annihilating plainness. "Do you hear? that is what you are always longing for—love—nothing else. That is what you have been tearing up and down the earth in search of—love, forever love! You may call it philosophy, ha! ha! or science, ha! ha! or philanthrophy, or charity; but I say that it is love—nothing else—love! love! Do you hear, Margaret? Then say it—I want love, I want love! Let the world hear you speak the

truth. You need not be ashamed of it, girl! Don't pretend that you despise the emotion. Goodness help the woman who says that she does not want love—what an unnatural thing she is! But that isn't you, Margaret—not you. You are not afraid to call things by their right names."

Nevertheless, when the passion of the hour had worn itself out, she hid her heart again with cunning, as women will, and smiled her woman's smiles, clutching all the while with her strangling woman's hands at the throat of this new-found consciousness.

But apart from her mental characteristics, to attempt to describe Margaret Blaine would be pure impertinence, for she was like the after-glow of the sunset or the warmth of an Indian summer, or better yet, the subtle fragrance of rich flowers—indescribable! There was about her an impalpable something, an essence, an atmosphere which she exhaled, that reminded one of no other woman, beautiful or plain. And in spite of her mental restlessness she was full of sensuous physical repose; but her enemies said

that it was the repose of the stealthy cat or the crouching tiger—suggestive.

It must be admitted, however, that she carried herself at all times as a well-bred woman should; that she smiled serenely, spoke softly—a charming quality in her sex; that she moved simply and with grace —a rarer gift yet, and one harder to forgive, especially when oneself suffered by comparison; and that her presence and silence were like the speech and touch of less magnetic women.

She never posed—a positive virtue was this, for although one may conceal what exists, if it be done quietly and well, nothing forgives a pretence which is flaunted with the seriousness due to a principle.

That she had given such sweeping confidence to Theodore Derwent was due to himself and the scrupulous honesty of his purpose toward her when he asked for her love and her life—gifts impossible to bestow; she showed him with annihilating abandon the barrenness of his hope. But with his departure from Glenmere, which followed immediately after the interview in the garden,

Margaret became filled with passionate regret for what she could not recall.

"But he will never understand," she urged to herself; "*he* could not! Poor Teddy! he is sure to imagine everything else—all kinds of impossible things—but never the truth. No, never that. He is too honest and conventional himself; he will wonder—but he will never understand—never!"

She was pacing feverishly up and down the length of her room, controlled by a burning emotion, her trailing, silken robe rustling softly after her with the undulating grace of a creeping thing gliding over dried forest leaves.

The cathedral chime in the gilt-bronze clock upon the silken-draped mantel slowly counted the hour of twelve. Margaret paused at the sound; the dim light of a rose-shaded lamp fell upon her hands clasped over her head, and her eyes cast down. She was struggling to resist a force at her heart like the restrained efforts of an imprisoned creature at the bars of its cage.

Suddenly she sensed the glowing sheen of

her gold-green dress, which had quivered into silence about her feet, like an alert, curious, living thing. She started in superstitious fear.

"Ugh! what a terrible gown it is!" she said, tearing open the front; and, slipping free from its folds, she backed steadily away into the gloom of the far end of the room.

"How uncanny some things are!" she panted, with staring eyes; "it is just as if they had worn form, shape, and sense before they were what they are."

But still she gazed as if fascinated at the glowing mass of silk and lace upon the floor.

"I hate it," she whispered, "the treacherous thing!" and making a sudden dash back, she stamped fiercely once, twice, a dozen times upon the shimmering, senseless heap. Her flesh was thrilling, her eyes were ablaze, for the moment was real; she was battling desperately with an imaginary foe to save her secret from peering, curious, worldly eyes—the midnight seemed full of them.

The moment grew more tense.

"I cannot stand it!" she gasped; and fling-

ing the shutters wide, she stretched her arms to the embrace of the night.

But in another instant she had recoiled, suffocating, against the window casement.

"Gracious! what a night it is!" she breathed, hushed and pale. She had forgotten her bared throat and neck and arms—forgotten everything save the dense fullness of the hour replete with speechless living things; for the wraith-like shadows among the trees, like spirits returned to the haunts of men, seemed whispering her secret among themselves.

"Oh, Father! spare me," she cried, in piteous appeal.

Her white bosom tossed and rose and fell; the burnished masses of her hair escaped their braids and jewelled confining pins, and rioted on the midnight air.

"Spare me! spare me—Alex! Alex! Alex!"

Out of the unyielding density of the night a voice of ecstacy breathed her name.

"Margaret!"

It was the voice of love, distilling sweet hope.

"Margaret!"

She had crossed the border land of despair; and her face was radiant with the welcoming breath of love's heaven.

"Alex!"

"Here."

The earth had changed; all the speechless things burst into sudden, exultant song, delicious, entrancing, surcharged with the melody of the spheres.

"I thank the gods."

The night no longer filled her with alarm, for Love was near.

"Dear heart!" he said.

The hour was precious, and would soon be gone.

"It was so dreary," she breathed him low.

"And you were afraid," he accused her, gently.

"Yes, until you came."

"And did nothing tell you that I was near?"

The slanting moonlight reflected the overflowing depths of her lifted eyes.

"You are always near."

"And yet you were afraid."

"I cannot help it, when—"

"I know," he assured her, softly.

"The world is so cruel," she shivered. "Oh, why can it never understand?"

"Hush, dear one; it never can."

"No, no; that is what makes it all so hard to bear."

"But to-night there is no world—only you and me."

"I wish that the night were eternal."

"Poor heart!" he said, and stroked her hair.

"When I am so happy—oh! say it is not strange that one should wish to be happy."

He was regarding her with solemn pain.

"It is not strange," he said.

"Nor wrong," she urged, insistently.

"Margaret!"

"Say, Alex, that it is not wrong."

"Margaret, Margaret!"

"Do, do say that it is not wrong."

"It is human!" The words burst from him against his will.

"And we must be human, in spite of it all," she pleaded.

He drew sharply away.

"We are breaking the faith."

His voice came harsh and short.

Great billows of contrition surged over her at his tone, and she fell upon her knees in the dewy grass, her hands interlaced in passionate remorse.

"Forgive me, Alex; forgive."

"How she tears my soul!" he whispered hoarsely, holding himself apart by a masterful effort.

"But I will not do it again, I will not! I promise you, Alex, and I will not—never again! Only, to-night," she hurried on with breathless entreaty, "I could not bear it. It was terrible—you do not know!"

A vague smile, like pain, haunted his lips.

"Dear heart, I do know," he said; "I know it all—I lingered here because I knew."

"And did you think that I would call?" She was straining to catch his answer, the pent-up eagerness of her parted lips, like the up-springing flame from a druidess' altar, thrilling his blood with the bewildering pain of sacrifice.

"I could not tell that."

"You hoped—" she was leaning toward him yearningly, the warmth of her breath caressing his cheek, the hunger of a lifetime in her eyes.

He swerved, and in the instant a mortal longing took him to her feet. But she sprang back at the touch which she felt approaching, ere it fell upon her. Her face was blanched with terror.

"Don't, don't! The faith! the faith!" she cried. "You shall not touch me; I am an accursed thing to make you forget the faith."

The spell was broken; his muscles relaxed —he breathed again.

"I shall learn to keep the faith if you trust me," she said, when the storm had passed.

"I fear myself more than you," he replied.

She reached him a hand which held no temptation in its palm, reassuring and warm.

He took it silently, and they walked that way like children for a time.

"Do not doubt me again," she whispered at length.

"I will not."

"I do not mean about the faith."

"What then?"

"That day in the garden."

"Yes," he said, in the light of a recollection borne in upon him from the world in which they lived, "I remember."

"You did doubt me then?"

"It was only for a moment."

"But that was too long."

"I will not again."

"No, do not; it weakens my courage."

"Dear heart!"

"I need always to know that you think me true; it is that which will save me."

"Don't, Margaret! don't make it depend upon me."

His hand closed over hers in remonstrance.

"But who then?" she asked; and the simple trustfulness of the question went home to his heart. He was staggered by its innocent directness.

"We must do what is *right*," he remarked, at a venture.

"I feel that," she replied, "and you must

always show me the way; that is, if I do not see it for myself. But I shall try; you may be sure that I shall try."

"I know it, dear heart."

"If it could be like this to-night, if I could always be sure of your hand when the way seems dark, if you could help me—ever so little—just over the rough, hard places, if I could hear your voice saying, 'dear heart,' this way, I am sure that I should always do what was right. If it could only be—just—like—this."

He gazed down at her clasped hands and eager, trustful face, while infinite pity for himself and her welled up from the fountains of his soul.

"You see," she went on, "I was always impulsive as a child, and never did what was right because it was right, but always to please mother Hetty; and since I have grown older and have thought and reasoned about everything so much more, I feel the morality of things even less than I used to. I am never sure of anything now—except you—and what I would do to please you."

She lifted a little pathetic smile to his face; but how she was torturing him with her candid self-searching!

"Before I met you I used sometimes to feel myself capable of almost anything," she went on; "anything desperate, I mean, just to get away from the dead level of the people I knew—they tired me so; and at other times I used to believe, because it pleased my vanity to believe it, that nature had singled me out for some kind of mission—for some sort of great inspired work in the world; and after papa left me that fortune I was sure that it must be so; but it was all a mistake—there was nothing in it at all—there was absolutely nothing left for me to do. What I might have done indifferently well, somebody else was always doing better, because they were people in earnest, who loved to do good, while I was pretending, and never feeling anything honest—nothing except that terrible, torturing ennui which I suppose all girls who grow up without mothers must feel at times."

"Poor child!" he said, almost sobbingly.

"Yes, I was a poor, unfortunate child," she

continued, plaintively, "but not nearly so unfortunate then as I was after I came to be a woman. I was always unfortunate—always until I met you."

"What?"

His forehead was drenched with excitement, his face was desperately pale, and his lips twitched convulsively, like the lips of a man in mortal agony.

Margaret turned upon him wonderingly.

"You are ill," she cried, swept by sudden terror at the sight; "you are ill."

"No, no," he said, hoarsely, crushing both of her hands within his own until she winced with the pain. "It is nothing—it is gone."

"See;" she held up her hands fairly bleeding where the sharp points of her jewelled rings had crushed into the soft flesh. "See, Alex! you *were* ill."

"For a moment, perhaps, but it is over now," he replied, forcing a smile. "How cruel I was to those tender little hands!"

He stroked the bruised places softly, and then pointed to the east, where the first faint wave of light suggested the approaching day.

He could not let her go back again to what she had been saying; he could not bear any more of that sort of thing now. Her dependence upon himself had nearly overwhelmed him before, but the rest of it was ghastly—nothing less.

She clung to his hands.

"I have been so contented," she said; "and when I need you so very, very much, I shall call you again; for it makes me natural and gentle and womanly—so much better than I was before."

He was incapable of remonstrance with her at the moment.

"But I shall keep the faith," she said, reassuringly; "you may trust me to do that."

"God help you," he replied.

"And *you* must help me."

"Then God help me," he said, more fervently than ever prayer was breathed to heaven. "And now, dear heart, good-bye."

She looked at him wistfully where he stood with folded arms and deep-set eyes, watching her as she backed away. At the low French window by which she had left her room she

paused again, and through the yellow gloom of the first awakened morning their hearts held each other for a second in an embrace of deathless love—then he strode away into the park.

Within her own room Margaret flung back the cloak of soft enfolding white stuff which she had snatched up when she went out into the night.

How changed the great room seemed! The mellow light from the rose-shaded lamp fell upon her white bed with its damask silk and lace hangings, making of it a pure, roseate shrine inviting as the couch of an angel. The cathedral clock ticked cheerfully; her favorite big chair with its many cushions was drawn up, never more invitingly before the little book-bestrewn table. Everything seemed filled with an interior sense of restfulness and repose, like the languorous calm in her own soul.

Margaret breathed it all in with parted, smiling lips dreamily, and threw herself half-dressed upon a couch to revel in the mystical nearness of love. That last, powerful glance had diffused her soul with perfect peace.

CHAPTER III.

ALEX. YANDELL, married to one woman, was in love with another; and, greater misfortune yet, that other, Margaret Blaine, was in love with him.

Like hundreds of other men, Yandell had married, during the period of adolescence, the first girl who attracted his boyish fancy; and the years had brought him bitter remorse for his haste. The fact could not be denied: Mrs. Yandell gave him nothing in marriage except sons and daughters with regularity—and one might almost add, irresponsibility.

It was bad enough for them both that she could not enter into and comprehend his constantly expanding genius; but it was worse that he could not rouse her to interest in the wider moral sympathies which were such an essential part of his immortal growth.

Had, however, the woman remained, as the

years went on, what she once was, a merely pretty doll, with interesting, babyish ways, Yandell could not reasonably have found fault with fate, much as he might curse his own pitiable folly; but, alas for him! the doll face became heavy and dull, while the baby ways degenerated into affectation and commonplace.

Again, had she proven herself an exceptionally good mother, there would have been a redeeming feature to this relation, which was unfortunate to the last degree in other respects; but Mrs. Yandell was neither better nor worse than hundreds of other mothers who provide their children, each one with a nurse wearing a white cap and embroidered apron; her own solace taking the form of a a very silky poodle, which she personally washed and bedecked with fresh ribbons semi-weekly.

Not that she did not love her children according to the strictly conventional grasp which her mind took upon maternal questions. She never tired of telling a new acquaintance of how many times she went into hys-

terics the day that her dear, darling Bertie died—and no one, it must be admitted, could have mourned more correctly. Indeed, Mrs. Yandell adored the customs of civilized life to the extent of being scrupulous about the amount of her crape and the days and hours which she absented herself from the social whirl. To have worn her veil by mistake an inch shorter or longer than the prevailing mode for children's mourning, or to have had a pleat too many in her drapery, would have upset her nervous system for a week, and sent her to bed with her head enveloped in a handkerchief reeking with cologne.

When Yandell first discovered, shortly after marriage, that there existed no real compatibility between Mrs. Yandell and himself, he undertook the self-imposed task of bringing her up to a higher mental plane, so that there might at least be negative companionship in their daily relations as husband and wife ; but it was a blank impossibility ! To educate the woman was out of the question ; she would not read books, and even her school-girl

accomplishments were but indifferently kept up.

She danced well, however, and was on that account popular in the ball-room; and she had a fund of platitudes and small talk which served her in the parlor.

For the rest, she made calls on just the day that they were due, she rode in the Park at the fashionable hour, and was punctilious to the last degree in her observance of Lent. But never once, by mistake or intention, did she, in the twenty-four hours of a day and night, lapse from the wretched monotony of the dreary commonplaces with which she was forever boring the unhappy man. For Yandell did tire of it all during the first years of married life; and afterward, from boredom it became misery, pure and simple; from misery, desperation; from desperation, dull, lethargic despair; at which stage, to escape the maelstrom of recklessness which threatened him, the poor wretch gathered himself together, determined to face the worst, conquer its desolation, and thereafter live within himself and for his children.

The future was not an alluring one, for Yandell was a man of strong human sympathy, always longing for warm human companionship and such mental stimulus as a congenial woman would have afforded him. He was a man, however, whose ideals were pure, and the temptation to seek relaxation and diversity in affairs with women had never assailed him with a force which required active resistance.

It was not until confronted with the absolute certainty that the mother nature dominated all his children except Roy, the oldest, a lad of fourteen, that he felt the utter hopelessness of his domestic relations, and determined that whatever nominal marriage ties might exist between himself and the woman who bore his name, the miserable pretence at a real union should cease at once and for all time.

This position on his part was met by unqualified resistance from Mrs. Yandell, but it did not shake his determination in the least; and it must be confessed that there was relief

to the man's finer sensibilities in thus cutting loose from galling bonds.

It was afterward that he met Margaret Blaine.

Colonel Conant had invited him for the season (Mrs. Yandell went to Newport) to sketch and paint, for Yandell was an artist of some reputation, and the scenery about Glenmere was unsurpassed in the quiet beauty which inspires an artist's brush. At every turn there were bits of landscape fresh and unsuspected, until they broke with wildering surprise upon the enchanted gaze.

I have said that Yandell and Margaret met —eyes, hands, hearts, souls. The tale is told.

I have before this heard the conventional moralist enlarge upon the wickedness of *allowing* one's self to fall in love under such circumstances, and I have seen the righteous breast inflate and expand with consequential morality over the total depravity of the guilty one; but I have yet to meet the person, clergyman or layman, who has intelligently

pointed the way to escape this spontaneous attraction of two congenial natures.

As well might one tell the flowers not to lift themselves at the kiss of the sun; or the rivers not to rush to the embrace of the ocean; or the parched and thirsty earth to refuse the vital influence of refreshing dews—or even a spiritually hungry soul to resist the voice of God.

But writing of these two human reeds shaken by the wind of circumstances, Yandell and Margaret, it must be said that it soon became perfectly useless to attempt the concealment from each other of the consciousness which each had admitted to themselves from the first hour of their acquaintance, although silence was maintained between them for awhile.

But one day, Yandell, touched to the quick by the dumb entreaty in Margaret's eyes, burst forth in a torrent of self-reproach:

"I wish, Margaret, that you might have been spared this experience. It was bad enough for me before, but the knowledge that you, too, must suffer adds a thousandfold to

the poignancy of the cursed mistake for which I alone am to blame. I wish that I might have died before I was forced to upset your peace of mind."

"I am happier now than I was before," she said, looking at him with deep pathos. "I know now what love is; before, I was always longing to know, and feeling that I had missed the best part of life."

"We have both missed the best part of life in not knowing each other when there was nothing between us," he said, bitterly. "Now it is too late; nothing is left us but regret and suffering."

"I do not feel that nothing is left us," said Margaret, hurriedly. "I was thinking about it yesterday, and it seems to me that we have a great deal to be thankful for: we can still be friends."

"That is where the trouble lies; we cannot be friends," he said, with emphasis. "People in our situation always delude themselves with such sophistry as that; but it is useless. All said, love remains, and will remain, to mock the impotency of the conceit."

"Nevertheless, I cannot help being thankful for love," she breathed, impressively.

He was white with the strong feeling which swayed him.

"Because you do not realize what the future has in store for us; you do not even realize the danger that there is to both of us in just such indulgence as this. You cannot know," desperately, "that I, standing here before my conscience, loving you better than my own life, am possessed of a fiend that urges me to do you a cruel wrong! which at this moment says, 'Take her to your heart, love her, defy circumstances — she is yours!'"

With a little suffocating, involuntary cry, Margaret reached him her hand, but he did not move; with arms folded, grim and unyielding as a sphinx, he spoke again:

"No, do not fear; I am not going to yield to the temptation; I am not going to wrong you: but if we were to play at the wretched farce of friendship day after day; if we were to be always meeting and spending forgetful hours together, the time might come—would

come, in fact, for there is no deceiving ourselves about that—I swear it, Margaret, I would not outlive that day!"

She shuddered hysterically.

"Don't! don't! it is terrible," she protested.

"It would be devilish, for us," he replied, forcefully; "nothing less. But there is not a man living who has not more or less of the instinct of crime within him waiting to be roused. We must avoid the danger; we must part."

She looked at him with dumb appeal.

"If there were no children," he went on, "if it were only breaking away from—her, I should do it; I should free myself; I should feel that I had the right. But the children change all that; they are innocent—they are more, they are the hapless victims of their father's criminal indifference to moral law! I see it, Margaret, as you cannot; and with them before me, it is no longer a matter of choice—it is duty."

"I suppose that it must be so," she acquiesced, in a choking voice.

"It is so; there is no question about it. I am responsible to the world for them. I have no longer any right to such happiness as love and life with you would mean! I have forfeited that. The time to have broken away was before they came—years ago; I could not leave them now."

"No, no! you certainly could not," she replied, vehemently, forgetting the hopelessness of the hour in the swift rush of memory which recalled her own barren, desolate youth. "It would be a cruel wrong."

Even Yandell was surprised by her passionate self-forgetfulness.

"But this brings us back to ourselves," he said, abruptly, "back to the logic of the situation, which is, that we must part."

She clasped her hands imploringly.

"There must be some other way."

"What?"

She was silent.

"There is no other way, Margaret—that is, no other way for you and me. Such love as I feel for you is not the kind for clandestine meetings, for concealment, for—"

"Don't"—she raised her arm with a gesture of intense pathos—"don't misunderstand me; that would not suit me, for I love you."

There was something majestic in the very simplicity of the way in which she said, "for I love you."

"That is it; what we feel for each other is love, and we must not degrade it. I know that it does not seem possible now that we could ever come to that; but we are human, and there is but one way."

"And that is the man's way," she said, with such a piteous little smile that his heart was wrung with pain.

"But I do not think that you understand exactly how a woman feels at such a time," rather vaguely.

"I suppose not," he admitted. "But I do know, Magaret, that it will be better for us not to meet."

"You would rather that we should not?" She was bending toward him feverishly.

"No, I am man enough to *rather* that we should be always meeting—that we should remain together, in fact," he replied, grimly.

She started back, shivering.

"But that is not the question—that is impossible."

"It would come to that if we were to begin in the way which— It is no use, Margaret! we cannot play with fire and escape its flame. I may control myself long enough to talk with you as I am doing now; but I will not even pretend that I could meet you day after day, in intimate friendship, and not give way to my strong desire to touch you—to crush you to my heart."

A tingling flash of passion, like the swift play of lightning across a leaden sky, swept the pallor of her cheek and brow. The warmth was like a kiss from his personality.

"You think it would come to that," she breathed, with drooping lids.

"I know it would. I suppose that we might go on meeting in the presence of others —as we have done—and nothing come of it except the nervous strain," he replied, huskily; "but it seems rather like forcing matters to try it! Indeed, I am not sure but I think

that such a meeting as *this* between us is rather—absurd."

"I do not think that I am given to such severe analysis of causes and effects as you are," said Margaret. "Indeed, I do not think that I see everything as you see it. I am sure —yes, quite sure, that I should like to try—"

She paused, and looked up at him almost helplessly.

Great drops stood upon his forehead, his mouth was set, and his gaze seemed to penetrate to the hidden places of her soul—

"To try—"

He did not move, nor once take his riveting eyes from her face.

—"To try being friends."

"Well," he said, with the deep-drawn breaths of a man in the throes of a desperate conflict, "if we are to try being friends, I think that you had better tell me just how you would like everything to be."

"I think that I should like it to be just as if we had never said anything to each other—just as if we were other people."

"That would be a good way," he admitted,

with the most desperate humor—"just as if we were other people."

Margaret looked up with a serious expression, rather puzzled at his tone.

"But will it not be a trifle difficult for us, after having been dominated by a certain individuality native to both of us, to begin personating? Do you not think that we are rather—old, say, for that?" he asked, almost recklessly.

Margaret was regarding him with the same serious, anxious expression as before.

"I do not think that you understand me," she said. "I do not mean that we shall act, but only forget that this has been—no, I do not even mean forget; of course we could not do that; but we might go on just as if we had forgotten—just as if there were nothing to remember or forget: that is it," she said sagaciously.

He looked at her almost stupidly. There was something bewildering to him in her way of disposing of themselves as if they were two stuffed dolls.

He grinned rather sardonically when he

had sensed it in all its humor, but the expression was lost upon her.

"We shall go on meeting just as we have met—with all the others there; and all the time we shall know that we are friends."

"You do not expect that we shall ever be alone—by accident?"

"No, we must not do that—we must avoid all that. I can see the unwisdom of that. But all the time we shall be thinking that we are keeping the faith between ourselves."

Her innocent paradox struck him as unutterably pathetic.

"Yes, we shall be intending to keep the faith," he said, somewhat enigmatically.

"We *must* keep the faith—we must do that! And you will remain all summer?"

She had raised her eyes to his wistfully.

"I shall remain for the present at least."

That was all the understanding there ever was between them; yet they had met, once—twice—thrice, since then, each time drawn together by overflowing hearts. Each time she had called him, and each time he had *chanced* to be within the sound of her call.

For the rest, they had met daily, almost hourly, in the gay throng at Castle Mere. But so far they had been what the world would call discreet, and no one suspected them of any stronger feeling for each other than that of good fellowship.

And sometimes Margaret was comparatively happy in the thought that Yandell was near her; but oftener she was sad, for every day the hopelessness of love without marriage grew upon her, and there were times when she felt, as she had told Derwent, "starved—starved—starved, body and soul." And the worst of it was that there would be no end to it, that there was nothing to hope for, that years would not change anything, except it might be for the worse.

Sometimes the wild, despairing thought would come to her that perhaps death would in time sweep away the barrier that separated them; but the reaction from such musings always left her contrite and humbled, I might even add, shocked, and loathing herself.

"I am a fit subject for a lunatic asylum and the straight jacket!" she shuddered, one

day, after going over these possibilities. "It is horrible, horrible! to be always living in the shadow of a charnel-house, waiting to snatch my happiness from the dead; it is nearly as bad—as—murder!"

And after that she resolutely put the thought away from her.

CHAPTER IV.

It rained at Glenmere; toward noon it poured, by afternoon the whole country was aflood, and still the leaden clouds hanging low over the drenched earth gave no sign of lifting; and as night came on, the wind rose to a gale, and sent ghoulish voices whirring through the gloom of the thickly wooded uplands lying to the east of Castle Mere.

Flowering shrubs were beaten down by the trampling feet of these storm legions, and golden grain, which yesterday had lifted jaunty, tasselled heads to the kissing breeze, was lashed into sodden heaps; while here and there centenarian elms stood like dauntless sentinels against the dun fury of the night.

Even the staunch, strong walls of the castle shivered in the fierce clutches of the gale, which moaned and whistled about its rugged sides, and whirled a torrent of dirgeful sounds

into the yawning chimney-places, where the leaping blaze of hickory logs smothered the doleful mutterings in a warm embrace.

And the spirit of the storm seemed to have taken possession of the guests assembled that evening in the great north-west parlor at Castle Mere, for conversation became rather gruesome after a few futile attempts to lug in such subjects of general interest as music and art.

"Well, well," said the colonel, drawing near to the fire, and rubbing his hands together before the blaze, as if to lure an imperceptible chill out of them, "this isn't a very cheerful family to-night."

"Gad, Colonel," returned his friend Melvin, "this isn't the weather to make one cheerful in midsummer."

"Not very," assented the colonel; "in fact I don't remember that there has been such a storm in these parts for years—upon my word, it is just twenty years ago this night since we had anything like it. A singular coincidence, that," musingly.

The colonel walked to the window and pushed aside the heavy Persian drapery which

shrouded it; for it was a custom at Castle Mere to hang these oriental stuffs at the windows of all the living-rooms, to deaden sound whenever it stormed.

"We were building the castle at that time," he said, resuming the subject after a thoughtful pause, "and the east wing over there was just finished when the tempest came. What a storm it was! For two days and nights the devouring fury of the elements made a second deluge seem imminent; the lightning was something appalling, and the flash which pulverized that corner into ruins was followed by a crash which might have passed for the crack of doom."

One by one the guests had been taking up positions at the different windows commanding a view of the ruined wing, whose jagged and irrregularly shaped walls, now moss-grown and covered with clinging, friendly vines, could be seen in the pauses of the storm against the inky night.

"And you never repaired the damage done? How strange!" said Evelyn Pell, an English visitor whose notions of the American predi-

lection for whatever is perfectly new and finished could not be reconciled with such neglect on the part of a very American man.

The colonel smiled at her naïve surprise.

"Would you have liked it better?" he asked.

"No; a thousand times, no," she replied, protestingly. "I have loved that wing ever since I came, because it is like so much at home."

"English, you know," said Burt Sloane, mischievously; and then in a voice intended for her ears alone, "Do you always love what is English best?"

A sweeping color, rich as the ripe heart of a pomegranate, suffused her now. It was an open secret that they were in love, and waiting for papa Pell's approval and blessing.

"That wing was never repaired," the colonel said, "for the reason that nature's powerful architect had executed a piece of work which an Angelo might have tried in vain to originate. There is to me a rugged beauty about that rough-hewn stone, a cer-

tain fantastic gracefulness which could not be surpassed by the art of man."

"It is not remarkable that you should have come to feel that way with years, but I am surprised, Colonel, that you did not get to rebuilding before the sentiment of the ruin had fastened itself upon you," said Melvin.

"I have no doubt that I should have made that wretched mistake but for the timely interference of a visitor of my mother's then at Glenmere. I'll tell you about it, for the story is a rather interesting one. As some of you may know, before this castle was built there stood upon that sweep of rising ground beyond the park an old mansion house, the same in which I was born; in fact, this property has been a Conant possession for over a hundred years. My mother, who was a remarkable woman in many ways, was given to picking up the most singular people in her travels. It used to be a favorite joke of my boyhood, that she had discovered enough odd human specimens to start a museum with, and that she was always longing for an Act of Congress, authorizing the scientific extinction

of the life-spark in these peculiar species, and their classification according to individual differences."

"Horrible! What a little fiend you must have been, Colonel!" declared Mrs. Warburton, quite seriously.

"I expect that I was a pretty bad boy; in fact, there is an unwritten tradition in the family history to that effect, as Mrs. Douglas will bear me witness," laughed the colonel, nodding toward his sister. "But fortunately my dear old mother was under the protection of a gracious fate, and these unusual creatures were always coming and going in spite of me."

"And you are sure, Colonel, that you have not inherited the maternal bent; it would be ghastly to think that you were subjecting each one of us in turn to psychic analysis, and thinking of our classifications," groaned Judge Brent, the jolliest man at Castle Mere.

"I'll stand a trial on that point, Judge; name the bond. The ladies will, I am sure, qualify in any amount from curiosity until my story is done."

"Yes, do go on with the story; we don't care anything about the law," chorussed a trio of women's voices.

"Additional reason why I shall continue to urge the e-man-cipation of your sex," wickedly responded the judge.

"Five dollars for the Indignant Women's Fund," promptly demanded Margaret, with twinkling eyes, "and twice that amount for a second offence. No puns are permitted within the enclosure of Glenmere."

When the judge had counterfeited paying his fine, amid shouts of laughter at his drollness, the colonel resumed his story.

"Among all the strange guests who came to Glenmere during my mother's lifetime, probably not one could be counted more unfathomably strange than the Baroness von Gripenberg," he said. "She was a wonderful woman, and possessed of a power which, even at this distance of years, I cannot explain and will not affect to despise. It was not in the nature of a superstition; it was a dominating, controlling force, which one could no more escape than comprehend. At first

I thought her an ingenious affectation, but I came to recognize her as a revelation; a point upon which my mind has never changed. She was a being set apart by mental developments no less interesting than remarkable; and she claimed in all seriousness to have lived a conscious existence for over two thousand years."

"She must have been a downright crazy crank," tersely remarked Mrs. Warburton.

"But we had no cranks in those days," the colonel smiled; "and," reflectively, "admitting the excellence of the term for general application to eccentric people, it would in no way apply to the Baroness von Gripenberg. Indeed, so far was she removed from any form of mental unbalance, I am compelled to admit that I have never met with a logically clearer mind in man or woman. She was the spirit of justice incarnated in human form, and wisdom fell from her lips with a spiritual refreshing that was as grateful to the heart as the sight of a crystal stream to the famishing traveller on an arid desert."

"To say the least, she must have been

interesting as a study," Melvin remarked. "But how did you reconcile such wisdom with such a strange hallucination concerning the length of her life?"

"I could not reconcile it, and for that reason finally accepted the fact on her own recognizance."

"Great Jove, Colonel! you don't mean to say that you believed in that fiction of the imagination."

"By what authority should I deny it?"

"Why, reason and sense, man!"

"Alas! my dear Melvin, the virtues which you have named are limited with each one of us to the measure of his own finite endowments. My powers may be both greater and less than others of my neighbors enjoy."

"I grant it, but nothing is proven."

"Nor disproven, which is equally important. In a word, the limitations of reason and sense are the limitations of the individual horizon."

"But there are natural limitations to all things."

"How so, when the ablest philosophers of

the world have been unable to discover them? There can be no fixed and universal philosophy of life until the age of revealment is past; and you will not pretend to say that the centuries which have given us a Newton, a Franklin, and later an Edison, to demonstrate the illimitability of natural forces, are those in which to limit the Infinite Sense."

"But you, on the other hand, Colonel, will certainly not deny that the beginning and end of conscious existence are the birth and death of material forms; nor will you, I am sure, deny that there are certain fixed laws governing these natural conditions."

"Why should I affirm it, when my affirmation must be opposed to the negation of one whose spiritual education embraced the classics at a time when my own was scarcely begun. But in point of truth I neither deny nor affirm it. The Baroness von Gripenberg said, 'I know that a human soul may pass from one physical incarnation to another, because I have experienced it.' You must perceive, my dear Melvin, that it would have been both shocking and unwarranted for me

to have said—'Impossible, madam; you certainly must be unbalanced in mind, because *I* do not conceive that such a thing can be possible.'"

"Assuredly, Colonel, if you were speaking as a gallant."

"To have spoken at all in the face of such revelation as the lady made concerning truths and events anterior to my own knowledge would have been to speak as an egotist. I could not say, 'Madam, I know,' when I had not even assumed the mental or spiritual attitude of inquiry. I might have said, it is true, that modern theology teaches, etc., etc.; but I should also have been compelled to add that modern theologists differ among themselves concerning spiritual questions."

"But all the Churches agree in believing that people begin to exist at birth!" declared Mrs. Warburton, stiffly.

She was shocked at such heresy, for she was nothing if not a staunch supporter of the dignity of the creeds.

"And in so far, I assure you that the baroness agreed with the Churches," the

colonel replied, "the only difference of belief being a difference of time. She remembered to have begun her conscious existence several centuries before, and to have suffered the bodily death and spiritual renewal many times, each physical manifestation taking a higher form, as befitted the eternal soul. When I knew this renascent being, she felt that the end of her material incarnations was near, and she was greatly rejoiced."

"She must have been, after enduring herself for two thousand years," the lady remarked, with a sniff of superior disdain; "for my part, I expect to be done with myself at the Christian limit of three score and ten."

The colonel was visibly amused.

"I wish I could have met her," said Evelyn Pell. "She must have been delightful."

"She was not only a delight, she was an education to one who was permitted to know her well. So varied had been her human experiences that the historical events of centuries were the happenings of yesterdays, which she related with the vivid power of a keen eye-witness tracing the lesson of the ages

with force which was conviction. But I am digressing from the point of my story, which was her connection with the ruined east wing. That night of the storm, immediately after the lightning had done its demolishing work, several of us gathered at the spot to talk over the destruction wrought. Suddenly we felt the essence of a presence, and turning, saw the baroness coming towards us swiftly, with an uplifted arm. She was still in the robe which she had worn in the drawing-room, a filmy, white stuff —"

"I feel the chills running down my spine," superstitiously whispered Miss Pell to Margaret.

—"And without cloak or head-covering. In the massed gloom of the night she became a resplendent personality, a Priestess of the Storm—the Interpreter of the thunderbolts of Jove."

"'Behold the work of almighty wisdom,' she said, 'and from this hour let your ruin be consecrated as a temple sacred to the study of Eternal Truth. As one stone has fallen upon another, let them lie, each a symbol of the

undeveloped Kingdom of God in every human soul.' Swift as a spirit she swept within the tottering archway of the half-fallen ruin, and with a diamond pencil cut a mysterious character into a pillar of lapis lazuli which still stood in triumphant loneliness above the general devastation. It may have been a sentiment, it may have been a conviction, or it may have been a superstition only, but I could never bring myself to rebuild that wing."

"I should think not," said Miss Pell. "Why it would have been nothing less than sacrilegious." She was glowing with responsive exaltation. "But where is she now, and what was the character?"

"I have since learned from a wise Oriental that the character is one of great occult significance; and the last time I saw the baroness was in India. I visited that country seven years ago, and met her in one of the mountains of that mystical land, surrounded by a coterie of occult students. To-morrow we will look at the consecrated altar, but to-night I am

afraid that I have conjured up legendary ghosts enough to send all of you shivering to bed."

The colonel rose.

"Come, Mrs. Warburton, sing for us, to break the spell."

He offered his arm with courtly politeness to that lady, who had a voice of superb power, and led her to the harp, with which she always accompanied herself.

The song, a quaint Scotch ballad, was just finished, when a telegram was brought to Yandell by a messenger from the village five miles away.

"No bad news, I hope," said his host, solicitously, knowing that the message must be an urgent one for a man to undertake its delivery through such a dangerous storm.

Yandell had risen with a stricken face.

"My oldest boy is dying," he said, with the tense self-control characteristic of strong men in seasons of sudden grief. "I shall have to trouble you for some kind of a rig to get me to the nearest station in time for the night train."

Everybody was immediately sympathetic, after the fashion that people always are at such times. Only Margaret was dumb, transfixed as if by a javelin flung from the hand of a couchant Nemesis.

"Roy Yandell dying!" She could not believe it. It was too bitterly cruel that the wretched father should lose his only child—*his only child;* yes, the rest of them were *hers*—not his; not an instinct bound one of the others to him—they were hers, by heredity, disposition, character, form, features—everything! But this boy was his—his very own. Swift, distinct, hopeless—rousing passions of rebellion and anguish for his bereavement—came the recollection of the father's delight and pride in this one boy. She remembered all that he had said of the boy's noble, manly heart; of his mental qualities; his promise! And all of this glad youth was to end in death. It was cruel; it was fiendish!

Stung into action by his misery, she started toward him imperceptibly. She would comfort him, she *would;* she loved him, and love gave her the right. She would go to him in

his trouble—in spite of the terrors of hell—she would!

But at the first step a myriad silent dragons of conventional propriety barred the way, and she fell back speechless and impotent.

His boy was dying—yet she could not get to him. There he was, with only the length of a room between them—yet he seemed an eternity removed. His boy was dying—he had never needed her as he needed her now, and yet she stood a helpless prisoner within her own chaotic grief.

But what was that damning thought which forced its way of a sudden into her brain, causing it to seethe with the fury of a flame of running fire along a sun-dried plain? What demon whispered the scorching words which were burning their way into her guilty soul?

"If the boy should die—his boy—this one—the only link in that desolate marriage would be broken. His death would set the father free from her—morally free. The other children are hers, but this one is his—and if this boy should die, his boy—his only boy—"

"Margaret," the colonel said, in an undertone, touching her lightly upon the arm, "surely you must have some word of sympathy for Mr. Yandell; his favorite son is dying. Did you understand?"

Margaret lifted a pair of unforgettable eyes straight to his own.

"I understood," she said. "What trite words of sympathy would you suggest that I should offer him, uncle?"

The colonel was chilled and surprised.

"What would you advise that I should say to comfort him?"

Light broke in upon him.

"You are right," he assented, "people do say too much at such times. I never thought of it before."

But Yandell had just left the room to get ready for his miserable journey, and seeing this, the colonel went off to consult with the grooms about his best way for getting to the station, whether on horseback or by vehicle, with the roads in their present washed-out condition.

Mrs. Douglas set about having a cup of cof-

fee and a lunch prepared, and Margaret was able to slip away unnoticed to her own apartments.

Here she proceeded with deliberation and care to remove her delicate evening attire without the aid of a maid. One by one she took the gems from her arms, neck, and hair, laying each with scrupulous exactness into its own place in the carved ivory jewel tray; nothing about her bespeaking emotion meanwhile, save the almost supernatural pallor of her face. Then she donned by contrast a pair of stout hunting boots and a dark, serviceable storm gown and cloak, with a hood to it which shrouded her to the teeth, as the low-hung clouds enshrouded the night into which she passed through a window-door leading to the verandah.

Never before had she moved with such concentrated, almost gruesome calmness under a dominating emotion. But where was she going, and what was she going to do? Descending the terraced lawn, she went straight across the broad front sweep of drenched sward, which clung about her feet

with a slushing sound like the hiss of a trampled serpent; through the fierce breathing of the wind which resisted every step; onward, into the very jaws of the remorseless easterly storm as it tore round the ruined wing; against the beating rain, with certain tread over the slippery carpet of soggy, sodden vines, straight to the consecrated altar of Truth, where she knelt with uncovered head in prayer.

Margaret Blaine had prayed for years, from force of habit, as most of us do, to an unknowable, formless dummy in space; but to-night she attained to exalted supplication to the living God, and she prayed for nothing except that Alex Yandell's only boy might live—that he might live! live! live! live!

Not a word for herself! not a word for the man that she loved! She prayed for nothing except the life of the boy.

The horse that was to take Yandell to the station was at the door, Margaret heard the sharp click of restless hoofs on the stone pavement, and knew that the last words of

adieu were being said—and still she wrestled and pleaded with bowed head :

"Merciful Father, spare his boy."

He was coming; above the clamorous sounds of the seething wind and rain she heard the quick approach of his horse's feet.

She sprang erect, leaped across the shiny stones, from one to another, breathlessly, and dashed, a brown spectre, directly into his path.

"He will live ! he will live ! he will live !" she shouted, triumphantly, above the storm.

"Margaret !" Yandell exclaimed, as his beast reared and plunged with fright at her wraith-like appearance. "Where did you come from ? What are you doing here ?"

"He will live ! Alex !" she cried, in reply, "Thank God ! he will live. Good-bye, Alex, good-bye. He will live—he will live !"

She dashed away again into the impenetrable gloom of the night, which hid her from his sight, as the pillar of the cloud hid the children of Israel when the waters of the sea divided.

For a moment Yandell held his horse

irresolute; then, remembering that he had a rough road before him and that no time was to be lost if he would catch the night train he put spurs to his animal and galloped away.

When Margaret regained her own room her face was aglow. In passing her cheval-glass she pleasedly smiled at herself.

"I look like a sea-nymph rising from her spray, in the curling vapor of these storm-drenched garments," she said, casting them lightly aside.

With blithesome step she went about her room, giving little womanly touches to things here and there, crooning meanwhile a soft lullaby, like a fond mother cuddling her babe. But remembering, when she thought about it, that the boy must be almost a man, she fell to whistling a rollicking, happy-go-lucky sailor-boy air.

She knew that Roy Yandell would live, and the exultation of it danced in her blood.

"I am sorry that Alex will worry," she said, pursing up her lips into musing regret as she unbound the shimmering coils of her hair, soft little tendrils of rain-curls from which had

stolen in impish caress about her transparent ears and neck. "I wish he knew."

When her bed toilet was made she sat by the leaping wood fire, reaching out pink toes involuntarily to its warmth, wandering into a reverie that followed Yandell as he rode like an erl-king on the wings of the night.

How she gloried in his splendid strength, as she saw him spurn every danger with a bound!

Swollen streams, sudden gullies, shelving rocks, lowland stretches, and treacherous marshlands lay in his path; and with Love before, Love behind, Despair in his heart, Death following close at his side, was there ever such a ride?

CHAPTER V.

In an upper chamber of a beautiful villa at Newport, Roy Yandell lay ill of fever. Above his pillow bent a figure in the sombre robe of the sisterhood.

Mrs. Yandell had just come to the door for the second time that day, to inquire how the sufferer was getting along.

When the boy heard her voice, for he was couscious now, the crisis of the fever having passed, his eyes opened within their darkly-circled lids with weary longing, but closed again when his mother went away without coming to speak to him.

Sister Anita knew that the lad was disappointed, and she stroked his forehead with tenderness.

"Mamma is afraid that the little sisters will take the fever," she said, in explanation,

in a voice so low that it scarcely rippled the quiet of the darkened room.

"My father did not come?"

There was a note of eager interrogatory in the feeble voice.

"Not yet."

Roy Yandell opened his eyes and looked at Sister Anita with a yearning, steady gaze—then turned his face to the wall.

But the father was nearer than the boy supposed; was, in fact, at that very moment on the stairway leading to his room.

His father had just arrived, and in his travel-stained garments was hurrying to greet his boy, when at a turn of the stairs where the rays of light from a stained-glass window fell obliquely, bringing them both into sudden relief, he met Mrs. Yandell.

Starting back, the unhappy man repressed a sound of dismay through stifling teeth.

"You seem surprised to see me," his wife remarked; "it is not flattering to think that my husband had forgotten my existence."

Forgotten her existence! What a ghastly joke!

"You wrong me, madam," he replied; "I am conscious of nothing so much as of you. I hope that I see you well."

She bowed, and they both passed on.

A gentle face appeared at the door in answer to his careful rap.

"Master Roy has been longing for you, sir. You will do him good," the sister said; and Yandell entered the room with a muffled step.

But the sick boy knew who had come, and with a glad, touching cry reached out his arms. In another moment, father and son were locked in a warm embrace.

"He has been a very sick boy," Sister Anita explained; "the doctors gave us no hope at all, but the change came suddenly, like the answer to a prayer."

"I shall get well quick now that my father has come," said the wistful youth, with the confidence of love.

And from that hour he steadily gained. It was beautiful to see them together all through the days of returning strength; it was a revelation in paternal affection, for in these first hours of gratitude that his son's life had been

spared, Yandell seemed to fairly absorb the lad into his own strong heart, holding him there with a grasp which was eternal; and the contact renewed life and vigor as if by magic within the fever-wasted frame.

When the boy was well enough, they drove together or wandered idly along the beach where the crowds of excursionists disport themselves in the surf; or, the mood being upon them, sought the more exhilarating pleasure of watching the restless ocean from the bold, rocky shore below the cliff.

Yandell found it easy to stir his son's poetic fancy by similes drawn from the natural beauties of the place; and he took as keen enjoyment in calling a flash of appreciation to the fine young eyes, as a lover takes in the blush which his well-turned phrase has brought to his mistress' cheek. His delight was boundless when Roy began making similes himself; and when the lad likened their favorite ledge, against which the spray tossed ceaselessly, to a sentinel appointed by nature to resist the march of an enemy, Yandell caught him to his heart with pride. After

that he fell into the habit of jotting down the best of the boy's imaginings.

But perfect as these few weeks of convalescence were to both son and father, weeks in which the former tasted the surprise of bodily and mental expansion under the stimulus of affection, and the latter the unalloyed joys of fatherhood, it was impossible that their idling should last.

Yandell had been thinking for days that such indulgence would become enervating if followed too long at a time; for no one knew better than himself that mental discipline must accompany mental consciousness to secure robust development, and perhaps it was the reflection caught from his own thought which prompted Roy to open the subject of their future when they were sitting one morning upon the piazza enjoying the ozone-laden breath of the sea.

"I have been thinking, sir," he said, "that I am getting well so fast, you might wish to send me back to the military school for the fall term; and I wanted to tell you that I would rather not go."

Yandell feigned surprise.

"Not go to school! how's that, my boy?"

"You said something one day about teaching me yourself for a year. I should like that much better. I would promise you that I'd give you no trouble, sir."

Yandell was pleased that the hint dropped had found echo in the boy's heart, but disguising the fact, he led him on to say more.

"I was talking nonsense then," he said—"soft nonsense to a big sick boy; wasn't that it?"

"I didn't think so, sir; indeed, I hoped not. I'd rather be with you. I hoped that we should travel somewhere for a year."

"Travel! Why travel? why not stay at home?"

Yandell was not prepared for the answer, which came in a blurt of perfect truthfulness.

"Of course I knew that you would not stay at home for me!"

"And why not, Roy?"

His father spoke tensely, with a face rather grim and pale; but he did not look up to embarrass the boy.

"You never do stay at home, sir; I could not expect it."

"Did you ever wonder why I do not stay at home?"

The unfortunate man was suffering acutely, but he felt that the time had come for confidence between them. It was evident that the boy understood something of the nature of the difficulty which had made his father a wanderer.

"I knew, sir, that you were not very happy here."

"What do you think makes me unhappy?" Yandell was still averting his eyes.

"I do not think that I could tell you, sir."

"Roy!" his father had risen whitely. "Speak the truth to me; that is what I expect to hear from a son of mine."

The lad had risen too.

"Father," he said, in the tone that children entreat when they fear the lash.

"Speak the truth, Roy."

"I cannot, sir."

The answer came as firm as his own.

"'Tis strange that you cannot speak the truth."

"I cannot, sir; I do not think that you would—want—me—to."

They were facing each other.

"But I do want you to," said Yandell. "More, I command you do it. I should be sorry to believe my boy a moral coward."

The brave young lips quivered painfully: "I would not displease you, sir, for I love you better than all the world."

"But you are displeasing me."

"I am sorry, sir."

"Is that all?"

"I cannot say more—I don't know what to say."

"You mean that you will not say more," his father returned, mercilessly.

"I cannot reflect upon my —" The word died upon his lips. He would not have spoken it to save his life; but all the time his eyes sought his father's with the dumb entreaty of perfect love.

A moment they held each other's gaze; then Yandell opened his arms with a raptur-

ous cry: "My son, my son! my brave boy!" and tears for which he felt no shame fell thick and fast upon the young head clasped close against his breast, and softening, yearning springs of tenderness stirred within him for the woman who had borne this boy.

The past was forgotten in the perfectness of the moment. Hope renewed itself; and the sacred sense of the supreme relationship of fatherhood and motherhood filled him with indescribable longing to once more lift the veil of reserve from between his wife and himself. He would go to the mother and thank her for giving him this son; he would resist the material differences which had separated them, and once more seek to awaken responsive echoes of sympathy within her. There must be some law of progressive unfoldment by which to accomplish their union, and he would discover it for the sake of their children.

How often he had indulged such dreams in the dreary years of the past, and how often his faith had recoiled upon itself he did not care to remember. He put the pleading

recollection of Margaret Blaine's irresistible and spontaneous affinity with the finer elements of his being resolutely from his mind, and with a single-hearted purpose sought his wife in her own rooms.

In response to the call, "Come in," he opened the door, and paused for further invitation upon the threshold.

Mrs. Yandell was lying at full length upon a luxurious reclining chair, idly swaying a fan. She might have been a graceful woman when young, but years had developed her figure into that type of maturity which approached *embonpoint.* Her complexion was still fair, but her eyes were small, and huddled together unpleasantly. Her mouth was full and red : a cupid's bow at sixteen, at thirty-six it was gross.

The trouble with pretty, voluptuous, soulless girls is, that marriage will change them for the worse. At eighteen Mrs. Yandell had pleased the eye with her roundness, her curves, and her sea-shell tints ; but these beauties had proven perishable as youth.

When she looked up and saw her husband

regarding her, she ejaculated the one word, 'Well!"

But he would not be repulsed.

He had expected to encounter surprise, perhaps resentment; but having deliberately shut his eyes to the fact that natures like his own and hers do not change with years, except it be to ripen into the fuller maturity of their promise, he was borne on by his own enthusiasm. He would arouse the love and pride of the mother nature, as his own father emotions had been aroused, and the rest would take care of itself.

There can be no doubt that the first touch of the miniature reproduction of himself first placed within a young father's arms fills him with a certain inexpressible, awesome delight; but the emotion can in no wise be compared to the rapture of the hour in which the soul of the boy speaks independently as a man, with all the fine courage and nobility for which the father has prayed.

Yandell was an idealist of a high order, an artist and a poet in emotion; and moreover he was a strong man. Whatever swayed

him at all, swayed him powerfully; so powerfully indeed that he was apt to deny, for the moment at least, the force of other dominant and opposing elements; and it happened for this reason that he believed it a psychological impossibility that the exquisite fervor of his own sensibilities should not communicate itself to the mother-nature when he crossed the room, and kneeling, raised her hands to his lips. She did show surprise.

"I have come to speak to you about our boy," he said; "our Roy."

How that other woman whose emotional nature responded to his own as the silvery aspen responds to the delicate breath of summer would have thrilled beneath the delicious vibrations of his voice as it dwelt upon the words "*our* boy, *our* Roy"! But this one, who did not understand him, turned a pair of small eyes upward, with a quizzical expression.

"He is a splendid fellow! true as steel! he will make a noble man. I want to thank you for giving me such a son, Gerta."

She made a little impatient movement.

"It was never a difficult matter for me to give you children," she said.

"But boys like our Roy are rare," he replied, gently, although her tone fell upon his sensitive soul discordant as the twang of an unpracticed bow across the strings of a violin.

"Oh, Roy is a good enough boy, I suppose," she said, "though he has some odd notions about him."

"He has a rather high-strung and imaginative nature," said Yandell, "and I have no doubt that he does seem different from other boys of his age at times; but he has a warm, true heart. We have reason to be proud of him, Gerta."

"You always made a big fuss over that boy, and seemed to like him better than the other children. I dare say you do it because you think that he takes after you. But all the children are alike to me. I'm fond enough of them all."

"As a mother should be," returned the husband smilingly, although her cold, maternal platitudes were icicles to his fervid heart.

He was beginning to feel rather awkward, for it was just dawning upon him that this reopening of a chapter in a closed book might, after all, end disastrously. He had been carried away by one of his old enthusiasms, which were no more comprehensible to her than a Sanscrit text to a boor.

And she had not changed. When he asked for the bread of sympathy, she still gave him a stone. But if he had failed to infuse his own rather romantic imagery concerning their son into her veins, the propinquity of a man upon whom she had the legal claims of marriage had not been without effect, and she turned toward him with ill-concealed triumph in her look and tone.

"I suppose that you mean me to understand that you have come back to live with me again," she said, with such naked unreserve implied that the question staggered him.

To men like Yandell, intimate relations with women are holy or brutal according to the circumstances governing them: the former when both soul and body are subjected

and enchained ; the latter, when soul and sense are divorced.

He was shocked to the quick, and in the sudden revulsion of feeling which he suffered it was not possible to disguise the bitterness of his disappointment.

"Gerta," he said, beseechingly, "for our children's sake let us forget ourselves for a few moments."

She rose resentfully.

"What are you here for?"

"I came because you are the mother of my children," he said, forcing himself to be gentle to her.

"I am to understand that you came on their account then, and not mine."

"The reason compliments you more than any other that I might give ; you must feel it so, Gerta. Before children were born to us, you were to me a pretty woman who had won my affection ; now you are their mother, and they are part of my immortal being."

"That is, I suppose, a polite way of telling me that I am no longer pretty, and you are no longer affectionate," she replied, irri-

tatingly. "The children cannot be denied, or—"

"Stop, Gerta!" commanded Yandell, sternly, sensing what she was about to say, while there was time to prevent it. "You shall not say what you know to be unjust and degrading to us both."

"Shall not," she repeated, mockingly. "Well, really, Alex, your manners have not improved since I saw you last."

"I beg your pardon," he said, quickly, not feeling spirit for bickering. "I did not intend to assume a tone of authority with you. I am sorry that we cannot understand each other better."

"Whose fault is it?" she demanded, with an accusing tone.

"Who knows," he replied, wearily. "I should be glad to feel that we were united for our children's sake."

"You are always talking about the children's sake. I should think that a woman who had consented to bear six children, when most women now refuse to have any, might be allowed to forget the fact for a little while

at a time; but you always flung them into my face. My mother told me often enough that I should regret giving in to your fine notions about having children, and I do. It is a great mistake! children ruin a woman's looks. besides interfering with her pleasures in life. If I had my days to live over again I would not bear a child to please any man."

"If we had our lives to live over again, with experience to guide us, there is no doubt but we might both avoid many mistakes," said Yandell, almost bitterly, a great wave of remembrance sweeping over him, upon which was borne a woman's face, delicate but distinct; a face full of rich, passionate soul sentiment, with eyes which mirrored every changing shade of his own complicated nature, as a pellucid lake reflects the objects which embrace it. "But it is too late to talk about that, and I would that we might learn how to make the best of what we have."

"And who hinders it?" asked Mrs. Yandell, with an injured air. "I am sure that I do not. I have a great deal to bear, as everybody knows. There are those who do not

hesitate to say that I am a badly neglected woman."

Yandell bit his lips to keep the burning reply upon them from rushing into speech. When he could control himself sufficiently to trust his voice, he said: "The world is always ready with judgment upon what it does not understand. I have never wished to neglect you, Gerta; the one dream of my life has that we might become more, instead of less to each other."

"Then why did you refuse to live with me?"

He met her question squarely, moved by an impulse of truth which was too strong for resistance: "Because I did not wish to degrade you or myself."

"Your reason was a very fine one," she replied, with ill-concealed sarcasm. "I do not think that everybody would understand it."

"Nor is it necessary that they should. A man's private relations with his wife are not matters for outside discussion and interference. What is, or is not, should rest between ourselves and God."

"Servants do not think so; they know a great deal more about family affairs than we give them credit for. There is not a servant in our employ who does not know that you have thrown me off. It is not a very pleasant matter for a woman to feel that her servants are saying that she has not the charms to hold her husband's love, and wondering if he goes elsewhere."

"Gerta, spare me such coarseness, unless you wish me to think that you regret the incidental relations of marriage more than affection and companionship," said Yandell, with keen disgust.

Mrs. Yandell bristled in reply, and said, insinuatingly: "I cannot help what people are saying, and I must confess that I have often wondered at the great change in you."

"But you have never suspected me of unfaithfulness, Gerta," Yandell retorted, challenging her gaze.

"And why not?" she demanded, almost flippantly; "you did not object to my caresses, nor deny me yours, when we were first married. There must be some reason for it now."

"There is a reason; you are right, Gerta," said Yandell, with dignity—"a reason so potent that I was a fool to think that it could be overcome."

He was thoroughly aroused, and alive to the fact that the breach between them had widened past spanning.

"I married you when we were both young. My faith was of the enthusiastic and impossible kind, and it made everything rose-hued. One child and another came to us so quickly, as added links between us, that I did not realize that you were not filling my nature, nor I yours, until it was too late. I could curse myself for that mistake!"

He paced up and down the room, with head bowed and hands clenched behind him, for several minutes, his face working painfully.

She watched him with a kind of nervous bravado meanwhile, wondering if she had gone too far. She had not intended to do that. Although she could not resist the disposition to whisper her miserable suspicions

she did not wish to drive him from her altogether.

Presently he paused in his tempestuous walk, and facing her with steadier resolution than she had ever seen upon his face before, continued, in a firm and measured voice:

"There is no use in deceiving ourselves with false hopes; I cannot make you happy, and you do not understand me. Our Creator knows that I regret the hopelessness of it more than I should regret leaving you a widow, and free, this hour. But so it is, and so it must remain. We cannot doff our inherited characteristics any more than an Ethiopian can change his color. There was, perchance, a time when we might have come nearer to each other by the exercise of mutual forbearance and determination, but even that day is past, and nothing remains but the same unalterable, indestructible antagonisms which have made marriage between us such a miserable farce from almost the first hour. No blame attaches to you, Gerta. I swear that I pity you more than I do myself, for you must have been a very unhappy woman. I wish

that I could suggest something for you in the future which would in a measure make up for what you have lost in not marrying a different man from myself. But that is difficult. If you would allow your children to sway your affectional nature they might in some degree supply the happiness which you have missed in your conjugal relations. I should like to feel that you were at least content."

"You are very solicitous about my happiness all at once," she said, with irony, not mistaking his meaning in the least. "I suppose that your own is so assured that I do not need to concern myself with suggestions."

Her words no longer provoked any sentiment except that of compassion, and he replied without irritation.

"No, Gerta, I do not look forward to happiness. I have no hope in life beyond bearing my disappointment as becomes a man, and doing my duty by my children. I should like to take Roy away with me if you do not object, for I have a fancy for educating him myself; and I shall always expect to make suggestions regarding the others."

"Then you propose to leave the rest of the children with me."

Yandell looked at her in surprise.

"I have no intention of being brutal to you, Gerta," he said, flushing, "I should not think of taking your children from you, of course."

"Your generosity is overwhelming," returned Mrs. Yandell, with a most unpleasant sneer; "but fortunately I am not deceived by it. You would find two or three young children annoying in your travels, I have no doubt; and beside, women do not take readily to men who are embarrassed by children. As I am not likely to indulge in intrigues, you can leave them with me safely. I will not allow them to interfere with you."

Yandell flushed again hotly; but he was past remonstrating with her, and thought of nothing but bringing the interview to a close as quietly as possible. He wanted to get away from her before she had forced his contempt. Disregarding her insinuations therefore, to outward seeming, he said with quiet directness:

"You will continue to occupy this house in summer, and the New York residence in winter, and a generous allowance will be placed at your disposal with Brown & Brown. You will be as free in every way as a married woman can be, while you will enjoy the protection of my name—and I should like you to do me the justice to believe, of my loyalty also," he added, with one of his characteristic impulses.

She laughed, a most disagreeable and rasping sort of laugh, in which disappointment and anger were equally blended.

"I am surprised that you do not propose divorcing me," she said.

Taking her seriously he replied, "Nothing would be gained by that. Our differences are not of a nature which the divorce courts could settle; and we owe our children something. By living apart we shall avoid the nervous friction of constant misunderstanding, while we shall be neither more nor less to each other than we have been ever since they came. There are facts which the laws cannot change, and our position towards each other

is one of them. For either of us to think of marrying again would be criminal to our helpless progeny. No, Gerta, divorce is not necessary; the laws of our common human natures have driven us wider apart than ever the laws of man could do. The children are the only bond between us, and divorce would not change the fact that they render all other relations impossible to either of us."

She lifted her eyebrows in an exasperating way which spoke volumes of suspicion, and might easily have been irritating to a saint; but Yandell had himself thoroughly under control. The devastation of his erstwhile beliefs was complete, and he was glad to bury them with as much expediency as possible.

He had taken a position which neither scorn nor entreaty could shake. He was in all probability leaving his wife forever; and he would not remember that his last words to her had been bitter with recriminations, whatever she might say to him. To this end he carried himself with firmness and forbearance, although he felt more desolate in the hour that he took his farewell of her than he had ever felt before in his life.

CHAPTER VI.

BREAKFAST, which was served at eight o'clock at Castle Mere, was a delightfully privileged meal, at which one might or might not appear, according to inclination. The mail-bag, which Colonel Conant opened at table, often proved an incentive to early rising, however, and it was not an unusual sight to see all the guests assembled between eight and nine in the morning in the charming breakfast-room of the castle—a low-ceiled, cosy, homelike place into which the cheerful sun-god poured his earliest rays.

It was September, and Yandell had been gone several weeks, during which time he had written a half-dozen letters to the colonel, but not a word to Margaret; neither had she expected it; nevertheless she often revelled in the delight of that silent telegraphy which is potent as any recognized form of speech.

There were times when every mile of the distance which lay between Yandell and herself seemed pregnant with subtle understandings which needed no interpretation of written or spoken words, and living in the confidence of their mutual love, she sometimes came near to forgetting the hopelessness of it all.

It was so much easier to forget the existence of a woman whom she had never seen, and for this reason could not recall feature for feature, to vex her peace of mind. Shadow people are so much less obtrusive than flesh and blood realities, whose hands we have clasped, upon whose lineaments we have gazed until every separate member has stamped itself indelibly upon heart and brain.

The colonel had just opened the mail-bag, and everybody was plunged into anxiety concerning its contents. Assorting the letters with a running comment of wit and conjecture concerning the probable nature of each, he came upon one from Yandell to Margaret, over which his brow grew slightly grave.

Instantly divining what it was, she received the letter with burning fingers and wildly

throbbing heart. The contact of this vital thing, palpitating with his magnetism, was like an electric shock to her, and she came near to betraying the ecstasy which thrilled her veins. Her first thought was to fly from the presence of others; but soberer counsels of the mind prevailed. Compelling self-possession, she opened the envelope leisurely, reading its message, written more between than upon the lines; and afterward, passing the letters to the colonel, she said, at a venture,

"This concerns you, uncle, even more than me, but upon first thought I am sure that I should like the trip above all things."

The note, which was without headlines, ran thus:—

"You will be glad to know that my boy is well again, and to learn that I have been spared the blow which would have wrecked my peace. We are going to the mountains at once, and I earnestly desire that the colonel shall join us, bringing along your aunt and yourself. I know that your persuasions will win where my own would fail; therefore let

not my faith in you be shaken by the failure of your party to appear at the Profile House before September 15th.

"With loyal remembrances,

"I am yours,

"ALEX YANDELL."

"Just like the thoughtless rascal to wish to drag an old fellow over those back-breaking hills in search of rheumatism," laughed the colonel, good-humoredly.

"Why, uncle," cried Margaret gayly, "people don't get the rheumatism at the mountains; they go there to get rid of it.

"That is as much as you know about the physical characteristics of the country, young woman. I tell you that those mountain fogs would give a brass man tweaks in his joints."

"But there are no fogs in September, uncle."

"No fogs, eh? but I say there are; I have seen old Washington wrapped up in his fogs for a week at a time."

"What, in September, uncle?" quizzed Margaret, humorously skeptical. "You are

thinking of August; now confess that you were never at the mountains in September."

"Confess that I do not know the difference between Tweedledee and Tweedledum? Not I; no man in his right mind would confess to going to the mountains before September."

"And why not, uncle?" demanded Margaret, with a saucy, dimpling smile.

"Don't urge him, Margaret, he is already committed to your side by that confession," declared Melvin.

"Not a bit of it," asserted the colonel, jovially; "I have always kept clear of committing myself to pretty young women, and gad! I'm too old to begin now."

"Nonsense," retorted Melvin; "you and I are just the right age to go into leading-strings, and I favor doing it for a month, with Margaret holding the lines. I like the sound of that mountain proposition."

"You do, eh? And how is it with you, Mehitable?"

Mrs. Douglas admitted that she would enjoy the trip.

"You're in a doleful minority, uncle, and

must yield," said Margaret, pulling at his whiskers, and planting a kiss plumply upon his forehead.

"That's the woman of it," said the colonel; "a little coaxing, a kiss, and if that does not work, a few tears, and we're vanquished."

"Then you *are* vanquished, uncle?"

"I will admit it on conditions."

"Name them."

"That you will not try to get me into any climbing expeditions, nor insist upon cracking my bones over those mountain roads on a buckboard. These are two forms of indignity against which my years rebel, and I shall not budge an inch until I have your promise that my peace and my pipe on the hotel piazza shall be respected."

"The easiest of promises to keep, uncle."

"At this distance, yes; but how will it be when we get there?"

"How, indeed, but as you desire, *mon cher* uncle?"

"Fair Eve beguiling the weaker Adam with her golden apple of promise," winked the colonel, with a grimace.

"But the modern Adam need not complain, when he is permitted to cool the sweat of his brow within the gates of a reconquered Eden," responded Margaret, quickly.

"What is it, Melvin, that Meredith says about the woman being forever more adroit than the man?" asked the colonel.

"I protest, uncle, that you shall not garble Meredith, and ruin his charm, which lies in the music of his thought."

"A poet whose thoughts do not read equally well backward or forward is not a poet at all."

"What logic!"

"The very best, my dear niece. The enervating pleasure in rhythm is not an evidence of poetic appreciation: music is not music so long as its expression depends upon its harmony alone. My objection to Meredith has always been that he is thoroughly romantic—that schoolgirls and sentimentalists enjoy him lazily, as one enjoys the luxury of a downy couch. The senses yield to his graceful verse, but the soul remains untouched. He is not a poet."

"And if what you say were true, which I

am unwilling to admit, what good is to be expected from applying the scalpel of too logical criticism to everything which affords one pleasure pure and simple?"

"My dear Margaret," remonstrated the colonel, "no more dangerous and heretical spirit could possibly take possession of a charming woman like yourself than that which admits the pleasure of the senses as superior to the exaltation of the soul. It is an argument which the opium smoker might urge in favor of his nargile, or the drunkard of his cups."

The colonel spoke with an undercurrent of deep meaning. It was as if a cloud had lifted between them, leaving naked consciousness revealed against a barren sky of cold, gray facts. He knew her secret.

"I do not deny that Meredith has given us some glorious thoughts—diamonds crystal clear, imperishable; but his work is upon the whole frail and graceful as the spider's web," continued the colonel; "and his philosophy, which is sometimes keen, must needs be served in the sensuous garb of picturesqueness, evok-

ing a shout of 'Bravo! Beautiful!' from his entranced and delighted audience. The true poet bends the knee and bows the head in silent rapport with immutable Truth."

Margaret, whose storm-tossed soul had been gathering the calm needed to meet the sequence of an unforeseen attack, rose with glints of suppressed feeling trembling in the depths of her eyes.

"To admit all logic superior to all pleasure is to accept once for all the doctrine of the ascetic, which would deprive life of everything worth living for, inasmuch as concrete philosophers agree that the profound logic of life is opposed to every form of enjoyment, negative states being evil because not distinctly good. The creed is false as that of the dyspeptic who argues that all philanthropy has its birth in personal selfishness, the proof being, that the results of generosity bring greater satisfaction to the principal than does selfishness *per se.* To accept such monstrous belief would be to damn one's self eternally. A week of it would kill every human instinct which links my faith to a God of love. The

human heart has rights superior to philosophy and more powerfully logical in their nature than any arbitrary laws fixed by the schools, rights which even Divinity is bound to respect or cease the work of human creation."

"She speaks the truth, Colonel, and she speaks it well," said Judge Brent. "I pledge myself on the spot to the work of inducing our next congress to create the office of Spiritual Examiner in Chief, that you, Miss Blaine, may enjoy the appointment. What short work she would make of some of those long-necked, cadaverous young theologues whose spiritual platitudes make one wish that scripture garbling were a high misdemeanor. What say you?" slapping Melvin upon the shoulder in a transport of appreciation for Margaret's outburst.

"Don't imagine," said she, with rather imperial playfulness, which served the purpose of disguising pain, "that I wish to quarrel with others for what they do or do not believe, while reserving the right to think for myself; but Uncle Conant has a tendency at times toward going over to the Philistines

which is alarming, and calls for protest. We always settle our differences, however, within the hour.'

She drew the colonel's arm about her waist affectionately, nestling into his arms, as children do into the arms of fond fathers, resting her head upon his shoulder.

There was a quality of irresistible sweetness about her which seemed at times to embrace all who came within her influence; a mellow, caressing tenderness which was as undefinable as the kiss of the south wind.

The colonel perceived that she was exerting this charm, in dumb entreaty to him to spare her when they two should be alone. But he was inexorable, and keeping his arm about her waist he drew her gently toward his study. Margaret was not the kind of woman to practice petty deception. She would not even attempt an off-hand denial of what was already confessed. She would rather have kept her own secret, but as it had passed into the colonel's knowledge, she was ready to meet with outspoken honesty whatever de-

mand he made. As they walked together, he said, interrogatively :

"You really desire this mountain trip?"

"Yes," she responded, unhesitatingly.

"You are quite sure that it will be wise to take it under the circumstances?"

"I cannot feel that it will be unwise."

"Would it not be better to think over the matter for a day or two, before deciding?"

"Perhaps; nevertheless, I feel sure that my decision would be the same."

The colonel tapped his boot thoughtfully upon the polished floor.

"Mr. Yandell and I are past the gushing period of our lives, uncle," she said, with just a touch of hauteur; "I think that we may be trusted."

"I hope that you will not deceive yourselves. Passion gathers force with years between intense natures like his and yours—and you are very human, Margaret."

The last sentence cost the colonel an effort. It sounded so much like accusing her. But she met his fear with a little dispelling smile.

"I do not pretend to discretion, uncle, nor to the moral power to forbid my nature that which it demands with the force of authority. I do not resist the temptation to give myself to him—"

The colonel's face, which was turned away from her, grew stony with a spasm of expectancy. He could not see the upspringing eloquence of the darkling eyes, and for this reason dreaded the worst, until her next words reassured him,

—"Because I think that you will understand that I could not control that fact."

She compelled his eyes to meet hers by the force of magnetic attraction. "I love him, it is true"—her delicate head was poised with the pride of an exquisite flower lifting its slender stalk in pure ecstasy to the sun—"and you are fearing that love might turn to lust."

He drew an inward breath, quick and almost stifling in its intensity. The colonel had read essays and listened to sermons directed toward suppressing the flesh and the devil all the years of his life, but he admitted

to himself that Margaret had for the nonce unaffectedly epitomized the morality of each and all of them.

"If that were possible, uncle, love would be a rather poor emotion, would it not?"

"You must forgive me, Margaret, for wounding you," he said, with apologetic candor. "I am a man of the world, and I know that such affairs too often end that way."

"Not when both *love*," she replied, with conviction which was unanswerable.

"But there is a certain forbidden pleasure in each other's society."

She lifted her head proudly.

"Why forbidden?"

"Because the world is apt to misunderstand love between people who cannot marry, as you must know, my dear girl."

"You mean that the world is ever on the alert for calumnies," she said, gravely.

"We may as well admit it."

"And what then?"

"I am asking you that, because it seems to me that the sacredness of any emotion which

had once been dragged in the mire by idle tongues would be forever gone."

"I will not deny that it would be terrible," she said, shudderingly, "but to live in the shadow of such a haunting fear would make one little better than a moral coward."

She lifted her face, glowing with vivid resolve, to the colonel's.

"We must bow to the Supreme Destiny which has overwhelmed us, uncle; but it is our right to defy the world to poison such pleasure as remains to us in the intercourse of mutual sympathy and sacred sorrow."

"Nevertheless, you will be misunderstood," the colonel said, with deep feeling.

"By whom, uncle?" she asked, with sweet dignity.

"By the world, my dear girl."

"And you must have misunderstood me, uncle," she replied, with a rich smile, "for we are indifferent to the world."

The colonel took both of her hands within his own seriously.

"Is it not quite possible, little woman, that you may do brave battle with the waves of

prejudice, to be overwhelmed by their bitterness after all? These little hands seem to me very frail and delicate."

"But Alex's hand is big and strong," Margaret replied, with a touch of her old playfulness.

"But you must not forget that Alex's heart and hand are divided against themselves. Admitting his heart yours by divine law, as you have made yourself believe, you will not deny that his hand is another's by human law; the logic of which is, dear girl, that Alex, as a brave and just man, is bound to protect the other in all human emergencies. Were the world to raise a question between you and her, he must sacrifice your peace to hers, or prove himself a traitor to his marriage vows. Are you ready for such a possibility?"

"Uncle!"

Margaret buried her face tremblingly upon his shoulder, after that one agonized cry, clinging to him helplessly. Presently she raised a despairing face, and from between her white lips, words, hot and passionate from

the heart, came icy cold, frozen by the effort of speech.

"How cruel it is! I have never seen it that way before. I feel that it will make me —wicked!" The colonel stroked her soft hair remonstratingly. "It will, it will! I know that it will! If faith in everything is killed, there will be nothing for virtue to live upon. I shall not care what becomes of me."

She slipped from him in the very abandon of passion. Her long hair, unloosed from its comb by contact with his encircling arm, clung about her, as dank seaweed clings to the drowning while the impotent struggle of death goes on.

The colonel stooped to raise her.

"Margaret, dear, don't exhaust yourself. I am sorry that I have shocked you, but to meet truth with such an outburst is unnatural and morbid."

"My God!" she moaned, "he kills the soul within this miserable body, and then bids the clay rise to meet truth with dignity due and discreet. Ha! ha! he must want to be funny."

"Margaret, Margaret," the colonel said, lifting her to her feet, while her laugh rang out chillingly as that of a mad woman, "your suffering must certainly have unsettled your mind. You poor girl, listen to me; understand me."

"I understand you," she said, sagaciously. "I understand you perfectly. I was deceiving myself, and trying to live with an empty heart because I thought that God was good, and man true, and you have taken away even the husks. They might not hold a kernel of truth, but they saved me, and now I am damned!"

"Margaret," her uncle said, in a deep, grave voice, "this mood must pass away; even our Saviour, the Son of God, suffered such bitterness as a mortal that he prayed for the cup to pass from him."

But all in a moment her despair changed to beseeching.

"Give me back my faith," she cried, with appealing hands. "You had no right to take that from me. I cannot live by logic, uncle; I must have faith, and love. I know myself

better than you do, and what is safest for me. Give me back my faith. Oh, God! give me back my love. What is the world that I should fear it! Shall I tremble before grovelling worms? Never! Don't teach me cant and hypocrisy, unless you bid me serve the devil."

The colonel was touched to the quick. "My dear Margaret, let us look matters fairly in the face. I do not question your faith in the righteousness of your love, but we are compelled to remember, whether we wish to or not, that the legal wife has rights recognized by the world as pre-eminent, no matter how little she may have been to her husband in the moral and sentimental view of the relation. The law invests marriage with certain arbitrary virtues which make the wife sacred in the eyes of the law-abiding world."

"You do not need to remind me that the laws of man take precedence over the laws of God where hearts are involved," said Margaret, bitterly.

"But I must remind you that the civil rite of marriage is not always the mockery that

this miserable affair of Yandell's would make it seem. Fortunately there are more happy than unhappy marriages; and I should be sorry to know that one individual experience had upset the teachings of a lifetime, and driven you into toleration of any such lax and confusing doctrine as that of union without ceremony."

Margaret looked at him steadily with deepening color.

"You alarm yourself needlessly, uncle," she said, rather haughtily. "I am little versed in social economics, but I am not indifferent to the fact that there must be some recognized protection for children."

"You do not go far enough in your logic, my dear niece, for there must be a recognized form of protection for husbands and wives as well; beside which, property rights and home relations come in for a share of recognition. The utopian scheme of uniting hearts according to God's laws is well enough as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough when it stops short of the legality recognized as essential and honorable by the wisest minds of the

day. What is there in the marriage ceremony to strike terror to the hearts of people who have made up their minds that nature meant them for each other? Only a fool would pretend that it is better to enter into an unrecognized than a recognized form of union. It is the devil's argument for betraying trustful women into the arms of cowardly men." The colonel was unmistakably in earnest. "A few may honestly believe in the doctrine, but they are weak and illogical beings who do not trouble themselves with legitimate premise and conclusion. If a man is honestly in love, or a woman either, for that matter, no civil or religious form binding upon them is going to change that fact; and if a man and woman agree to live together without love, surely they need the protection which the state affords to the legally married."

Margaret was densely excited: "That is the point, uncle; the state protects everything which is offered it in the name of marriage," she said, "with the result that the relation is losing its sacredness, and im-

morality is learning to cloak itself under legality."

"But no helter-skelter arrangement of the marriage reformers can change that fact, which rests with men and women themselves, no less outside than inside the legal marriage. It is not by educating youth to contempt for the form of marriage, but in developing a sense of what gives one the right to enter into the relation at all, that the happiness of hearts and the sanctity of homes may be attained. Bringing abstract law down to its concrete application, there is no denying that what has cost Yandell his happiness was his own mistake, and not the fault of the law by which he is bound."

"He does not accuse the law or hold anyone responsible but himself," said Margaret, with the lofty impulse of conscious pride in Yandell's sense of honor. "And he would not wrong the mother of his children even if there were no law but his own conception of justice."

The colonel looked calmly skeptical, although he was ready to admit to himself that

he did not understand the position that this incomprehensible feminine compound of reason and error had taken.

Here he had been blazing away for several minutes at moral law, with the enthusiasm of a platform orator, thinking to set her right upon an important subject which he had not the least doubt presented itself to her moral vision obscurely, through the bewildering mist of passion; and she now hastened to assure him, in substance at least, that neither Yandell nor herself had ever seen the matter in any other way.

The colonel was figuratively knocked to pieces, and ready to declare a woman the most inexplicable result of creative Law. One moment he saw her in the clutch of a violent emotion, shivering and writhing with defiance, hurling scorn at respected traditions with recklessness little less than blood curdling; and in the next, by a swift mental change, she was submitting her opinions to the manacles of worldly and vigorous prejudice.

"I cannot quite gather where you stand from what you say, Margaret," he put in, con-

cisely, as she went on talking in a vague and rather fragmentary way about the general law of love.

"I suppose that I am exasperatingly obscure in my powers of expression," she admitted, "for I have no genius in that particular direction; but I know what I feel."

"It would be a matter of satisfaction to me if I could know too, Margaret," the colonel responded, with just a touch of warmth. "I have stood somewhat in the relation of a father to you for a good many years, and I must say that I am not willing to extend my protection to any affair which I do not understand. I am not ready to take this mountain trip until I know what I am doing."

He felt better when he had put the matter so plainly that he did not believe she could possibly mistake his meaning. But she was staring at him vaguely through a mist of surprise, paling visibly as she made sense out of the quick, confused echo of his words, which rang through her ears like the whirr of the ocean in the curled recess of a sea-shell.

She had been leaning her head upon her

elbow, on a carved mahogany mantel, above which hung a large circular mirror of a quaint old-fashioned pattern. Turning herself with the heavy movement of a petrified thing she brought the other elbow into a corresponding position, and gathering her luxuriant front-locks into her right hand, she lifted them off her brow, studying her own face with impartial scrutiny. Then she reached out her left hand behind her, without taking her eyes from the mirrored reflection.

"Uncle Conant, come here," she said.

Wondering at her mood, he obeyed. She pulled him up to her by his wrist, forcing his face into line with her own.

"Look at her," she said, nodding at the apparition in the glass. "She is going to tell you the truth, and I want to see her while she does it. She doesn't look like a wicked woman, does she?"

Without pausing for a reply to her ingenious and startling question, Margaret went on, pointing with her finger:

"She loves another woman's husband, which the world says is a crime; yet she does not look

like a criminal, and her heart is tender. I have known her, even since she was a grown woman, to fish a fly out of water, and dry him in the sunshine—a silly thing to do, perhaps, but it was an impulse of her dislike for suffering; yet they say that wives suffer a thousand deaths through jealousy, when husbands prove unfaithful." Her voice had sunk to a chilling whisper: "She does not look as if she could tear another woman's heart out of her breast and gloat over the agonized thing—she does not look like the fiend who could do that."

"Margaret," the colonel burst out, hoarsely, "for God's sake, come away! What you are doing is horrible, and will drive you mad."

She was shivering from head to foot, and her voice came in gusts of passion from between her white lips and set teeth: "I will not come away. I am going to know her." She was drawing closer and closer to the staring, panting thing in the mirror.

The colonel laid a hand upon her shoulder, but she shook it off.

"I have got to live with her, and I tell you

that *I will know her.* If she is cruel—and wicked—" she was straining closer all the time—"she shall not deceive *me!* I'll unmask her. If those who know her best are afraid to trust her—I'll find out the reason why. She shall not fool me—I'll force it out of her—or—I'll—kill her!"

With one blow, the colonel, seeing that every fibre of that high-strung, sensitive organization was wrought to the pitch of irresponsibility, shivered the mirror into atoms.

"That thing always had a disagreeable way of distorting one's features," he said, coolly, as if nothing had happened. "I think we have kept it principally for its rather artistic shape."

"What made you do it? I shall never know her now," said Margaret, with infinite pathos, while great scalding tears rolled down her cheeks. In the next moment she lay upon his arm senseless.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Margaret opened her eyes to consciousness, Mrs. Douglas and a maid were busy chafing her wrists and administering some simple restoratives.

"What made—me—do—it? Mother Hetty, I—oh! I remember; it was awful," shudderingly.

"There, there, darling; don't excite yourself again," said Mrs. Douglas, tenderly; "you were tired and nervous, and the morning is a very warm one. You can go, Angelica; I will call you if I need you," dismissing the maid. "Just lie still, dear, until you feel perfectly strong: it is always best to keep quiet for several hours after such an attack; it may save a recurrence. I will sit here beside you, and fan you. Try to go to sleep, it will be better for you than a tonic; you will be all right by afternoon."

But Margaret had lifted herself to her arm : "I am better now, Mother Hetty; you need not fear for me again ; I am not given to fainting often, you know," with a little apologetic gesture.

"No, dear, of course you are not," said Mrs. Douglas, reassuringly. "It was nothing of any lasting consequence; everybody is liable to such an attack at times."

"But this was of consequence, Mother Hetty—it was of cruel consequence,' said Margaret, struggling to her feet with difficulty, because of her loosened and half-falling garments. "It was almost a death-blow."

She was shivering violently.

"No, not in the way that you think; I am not sick. It was here," pressing her hand to her heart; "Uncle Conant does not trust me, and it hurts like a stab. I can't help it, but it does."

"Nonsense, dear!" said Mrs. Douglas promptly; "why should not Uncle Conant trust you? You must have misunderstood him."

"No," returned Margaret, positively, "there was not a chance for it; he said so himself."

Mother Hetty was touched by her manner and tone, and sensed the fact that something of deep significance must have occurred; although the colonel had explained nothing when he called her to his study, and in her anxiety over Margaret, the shattered mirror had escaped her notice. "Well, never mind about it now," she replied. "When you are better, Uncle Conant shall be arraigned and made to confess."

"It is not Uncle Conant who is wrong, Mother Hetty," said Margaret, with a species of hopeless remonstrance; "it is I; I am wrong —all wrong. I was a great mistake from the first," she continued, with moving pathos, "I was always a mistake. Don't you remember, I was a mistake as a child! When you who were so good to me tried to set me right, I oftener went wrong. There seems to be a quality of inherent wrongness about me, which makes me worse when I ought to be best. What is it, Mother Hetty? I wish you would tell me!"

With nervous hands folded one over the other upon her lap, Margaret had dropped into a seat; and as she looked up with plaintive inquiry from out her glowing veil of fallen hair, like a forlorn Peri, tears stood in Mrs. Douglas' eyes.

"You were always a dear, sweet comfort to me, Margaret," she said, with warmth; "your worst faults in childhood and since have been the faults of impulse. I never knew you to do a really malicious thing; you were mischievous and full of spirit, but far from being a naughty girl."

"Was I not? I thought that I was, I used to feel so rebellious sometimes; and after I went to bed I would lie awake planning wicked things that I would do next day."

"But I am sure that you never did them, dear," returned Mrs. Douglas, gently.

"Perhaps my mother kept me from it," breathed Margaret, with far-away eyes. "Don't you think it possible that God allows such things when he takes mothers away from their babies? I know that I used sometimes to think such awful thoughts after the lights

were out that they would make me afraid, and all of the shadows in the room would turn into ghosts. It used to make me hide my head under the bed-clothes and go to sleep with teeth chattering; then I would dream that my own mother came and told me that I must do as mother wished, for she knew best. If Mother Hetty would only tell me what to do now!"

Margaret had turned to her with irresistible appeal, which was no less winsome because of its childishness. Mrs. Douglas' heart was wrung with the wish to comfort the troubled girl.

"Perhaps I can help you, if you tell me about it," she said, tenderly pillowing the lovely head upon her breast. Margaret reached up one arm, clinging to her shoulder.

"It isn't an easy thing to tell—it will sound almost—criminal—just as it sounded to Uncle Conant," she whispered deprecatingly. "But I should like to tell you—I might feel better for it."

Mrs. Douglas stroked her arm encouragingly, with a long, soothing movement.

"I ought to have told you before, I know that I ought. It has been very ungrateful in me not to do it. You didn't suspect, did you? Uncle Conant did; he found it out himself—and accused me. It hurt me terribly, Mother Hetty—I could not tell you how it hurt me!"

Mrs. Douglas continued her gentle caress, with no effort to hasten the explanation which had begun so incoherently.

"You do love me, Mother Hetty, don't you? Almost as if I were—just as if I were your own child?" Margaret asked, with a sort of haunting anxiety.

"I do, my darling. You are the only child I ever had."

Her arms were holding the girl with a pressure more eloquent than words.

"Yes, of course," said Margaret, satisfiedly. "I have been your child, and you must always love me; you could not help it—you could not—even if you did not quite approve of me."

Mother Hetty's pressure increased in fervor.

"How foolish I am to think that you might

not love me," Margaret gasped rather hysterically. "You could not help it: people can't help loving when they do—can they? I know that they cannot. If they could, I should not have loved Alex; but I cannot help it—I cannot."

"Alex?" repeated Mrs. Douglas, starting perceptibly.

Margaret was clinging to her with an appealing grasp. "Yes, Alex; Mr. Yandell."

"But Mr. Yandell is married," said Mrs. Douglas, under her breath, with involuntary surprise.

"That is it—that is just it. That is what is so wrong—it would not be wrong if he were not married."

Mrs. Douglas remained silent for such a length that Margaret began trembling with apprehension.

"I am worse than you thought," she said, in a heartbroken voice. "You didn't think it could be as bad as that."

"I was not prepared for *just that*, dear," Mrs. Douglas said, after a while, with no diminution of tenderness, "and I am trying

to see it all clearly. You must remember that this has come upon me very suddenly, and there has never been a time since you came to me that I have needed to think before I spoke more than now. Be quiet, while I try to see it just as it is, dear."

Margaret closed her eyes wearily, the curling blue-black of her lashes showing against her glowing cheek, like the fringe of the gentian against its heart of gold.

"Don't forget that *he loves me*," she whispered presently, without opening her eyes, the thrilling consciousness of the main fact overshadowing its horror in her tone.

"Then he cannot love his wife," said Mrs. Douglas, thoughtfully, feeling that with that point established she had better ground for advice.

"Of course not," said Margaret, as if the subject had never admitted of discussion.

"But men are generally supposed to love their wives," said Mrs. Douglas, rather dogmatically. "I am afraid that it is a great responsibility to have taken a man's love from his wife, Margaret."

"Why, aunt! you don't think that I did that, do you?" cried Margaret, springing to her feet. "Why, you cannot think that I am such a wretch as that! He did not love her before he met me—they only lived together nominally. I didn't change anything about that! How wicked you must think me—to suppose that I could break up a happy home!"

She began pacing the floor excitedly, and Mrs. Douglas, who had watched her moods from childhood, did not seek to restrain her, knowing that such expression would do her good. Moreover, she was somewhat relieved, for the question had—at least so far as she could understand it—narrowed down to the conventional one of divorce: and there is not one of us but feels glad to run to the cover of social or legal custom when brought into conflict with moral law.

"I could not have done anything so wicked as that!" Margaret panted on, feverishly. "I could not have deliberately set myself in the way of a loved and loving wife. I could not have stolen into their hearts when they were

unconscious, as thieves steal into houses in the dark to rob—just to enrich myself! Do you not understand, it was because my own heart was empty and his desolate! If his heart had been filled there would have been no place for me—he would not have loved me then!" Margaret paused with restrained passion.

"I want you to understand it just as it is: we do not expect to marry; we cannot do that! He has to think about his children. I would not expect him to give up his children for me."

"Then the matter is settled," said Mrs. Douglas, drawing a breath of relief, "and you want me to know that you could not help loving each other?"

"That is it—that is just it"—Margaret nodded acquiescently—"and I wanted you to know that we do not mean to do wrong because—it would make us happier to do wrong than to do right."

Mrs. Douglas was just a little startled by such criminal candor.

"Does it ever make people happier in the

long run, think you, Margaret, to do wrong than right?" she asked with gentle remonstrance.

"I don't know anything about the long run," Margaret returned, desperately honest; "I only know about what I feel now, and I think that if I could have Alex all to myself every hour of the day, through time and eternity, I should be happier in spite of everything than I can ever be without him, though I were canonized and made a saint a hundred times over, or even given the office of the Holy See itself."

Mrs. Douglas began to feel that the security of the relation between Yandell and Margaret hung by a rather slender thread, and she awaited her next words with nervous apprehension.

"We are going to do right because of the children. A man couldn't very well do wrong when he thought about his innocent children, could he? That is, a good man could not—and Alex is a good man. He is much better and wiser than I—though I could not wrong little children. I could not do that!"

The very thought filled her with unconscious trembling; but her face paled in the instant with the horror of an entering fear. She clutched Mrs. Douglas' arm with a savage grasp.

"You don't think—that I could have inherited such a—such a thing from my father?" she gasped, in a wild whisper. "You don't think that I could forget as he forgot—if I were tempted?"

"You are not very like your father," Mrs. Douglas hastened to reassure her. "You are more like your impulsive, tender-hearted mother."

"I am so glad—I am so glad," breathed Margaret, with relaxing muscles. "I am so glad! And she was a *very* good woman, wasn't she?"

"She was a sweet, loving, frail flower of a girl," said Mrs. Douglas, with silent tears. "She could not battle with sorrow at all. You are a much stronger woman physically than she."

"And she died of a broken heart!"

Margaret was sobbing audibly.

"Something very near it, dear," whispered Mrs. Douglas, with a choking lump in her own throat.

"I wonder if I shall die of a broken heart," breathed Margaret, reflectively, through a mist.

"Heaven forbid!"

"Sometimes I feel as if it would end that way," Margaret whispered, from Mrs. Douglas' shoulder.

'We always feel so in times of great sorrow or loss."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. It is the instinct of suffering."

"I have felt as if my heart were breaking—as if I could not bear it—for hours at a time," Margaret confessed. "Sometimes it seems so perfectly miserable to think of years and years in which I shall be nothing to him."

"It is very much like death," said Mother Hetty, in a hushed tone. "But youth is elastic; it is only now and then that one dies because life is empty. We live on and on, and other compensations come to help us bear regret. When I was first left alone I

could not see that the sun was shining in the heavens as it had shone, impartially for all; but I have lived to feel its warmth since then."

Mrs. Douglas was somewhat agitated, and Margaret was filled with sorrow for her part in recalling the past.

"Forgive me," she pleaded.

"Hush, dear, there is nothing to forgive. I have lived with my loss too many years for it to visit me as a stranger."

"And you have sometimes been *happy*," breathed Margaret, almost wonderingly.

"I am rarely unhappy."

"That is remarkable," in a whisper of tragic conviction.

"I do not think so. It would be more remarkable if I could go on year after year receiving so many blessings and yet refusing to acknowledge them because I had not been permitted supreme happiness uninterruptedly to the end."

"It must be that wives feel differently—from others."

"They must! It is not possible for one to

have known the perfectness of marriage and ever go back again to what was before."

That was not Margaret's meaning. "I was thinking," she said, "that after one had been a wife there would be so much to remember —so much to live over and over again."

"It makes the desolation more complete."

"I do not think it would be so with me. If I could be Alex's wife for just one day—if I could only once drink the very last drop in a burning cup of happiness—if I could have the experience of having been all! everything! earth and heaven—past, present, and future swept into one perfected moment of life—I believe that I would accept eternity and memory with resignation."

The passion of picturing such an immortal moment had kindled Margaret's blood into flame; her eyes were twin stars, and her bosom rose and fell beneath the soft folds of her gauzy morning robe in palpitating gusts of conscious feeling.

Mrs. Douglas, who had never, even in youth, been a woman of such fiery impulses as those

that controlled Margaret, shook her head dubiously.

"The dreariness of loss would not be less."

"But no one could take from me what had been. Now I have nothing! My hands are empty, and prudence bids me hide my heart from the eyes of a too suspicious world. Even what I might enjoy innocently enough in the face of heaven is poisoned by the eternal trail of the serpent, and sometimes I feel that its sting is in my very soul."

"I do not think you can ever hope to be contented again until you have gone beyond the waves of this turbulent emotion, my dear girl, into the calmer waters of independent self-control."

"But that is impossible; I cannot become independent of my love—I cannot; I have tried it! I believe that I can live a blameless life, if I am true to it; but I cannot live against it. I cannot tear my own heart out and cast it from me more than I could do that with another woman's."

"Then your future promises to be a stormy and desperate one, and a higher power alone

can save you," said Mrs. Douglas, with deep anxiety, in spite of her wish to soothe and comfort the passionate girl.

"I know that that is the way the world looks at it—but I thought that *you* might see it differently."

"How could you expect me to see it differently, Margaret, when all experience proves that self-indulgence leads on to recklessness?"

"But there is to be no self-indulgence," returned Margaret, with a wave of color showing through the rich cream of her skin.

"Then I do not understand you."

"What do you call self-indulgence, Mother Hetty?"

"Everything except forgetfulness—the resolute putting aside of all temptation."

"What a cruel alternative!"

"It is the only one."

"And I tell you that it is impossible with me. I cannot forget."

"But you do not invite the means—work, Margaret—humanity's work!"

"That is the same trite creed which has been in force since the world begun," said

Margaret, almost harshly; "and with some natures it does avail. But I might have the arms of an octopod to reach out in as many different directions for work to do, and yet I could not forget! I should still remember—and my heart would still be resisting its cruel fate."

"What a poor comforter I am proving myself!" Mrs. Douglas said, quite helplessly, but without impatience.

"And I must seem wickedly rebellious and ungrateful to you," returned Margaret, sorrowfully. "But that is *where* I am wrong. I never can see things as other people do; I never can—and you would not wish me to pretend."

"No, dear; your candor has always been a virtue. Nevertheless, I cannot help wishing that you might learn the lesson of life without the cruel necessity for sounding the bitterest depths of Marah."

"There is sorrow whichever way we may turn, Mother Hetty; but if we cannot be *friends*—sorrow will become despair!"

"And if friendship should fail you, my darling girl?"

Margaret raised an arm of passionate entreaty. "Don't, mother Hetty! don't think that it will. Don't make me doubt God's goodness."

Mrs. Douglas heard the girl with curdling emotion. Her words sounded like blasphemy or the foreshadowing of a lost soul.

"Oh! how I am shocking you! How wicked I am!" wailed Margaret, with remorse for the pale, drawn face.

"You do shock me, Margaret, when you challenge the will of God," Mrs. Douglas returned, shakenly.

"But why should it be God's will that I should suffer? Why? I don't believe that it is His will; I don't believe that He singles out mortals to torture them that way. It may be theology but it is not Godlike! I know that He means everybody to be happy—and loved! Why, the Bible teaches love, Mother Hetty, on every page—God's love; love for one's fellow-creatures, love for little children, love for one's neighbors—nothing but love! It

must be Godlike to love—and how I do love! I must be the sister of God's angels to love as I do."

The passionate sufferer threw her arms at full length upon the table, burying her face upon them with great gusts of emotion.

Mrs. Douglas was overwhelmed with the sense of her own impotency in dealing with such tempestuous suffering. She had known love herself, such love as most women feel: the quiet, satisfying, affectionate, rather impersonal kind, which having once been given to a man—any man, from motives of prudence, or respect, or attraction, or the wish to be married—remains fixed to the end, self-respecting, gentle, domestic; but she could not even imagine such love as Margaret felt, love whose violence uprooted traditions and devastated ancient beliefs with the fury that the arm of a giant cyclone wrenches the powerful creatures of nature from their feet, hurling them to everlasting doom; love which could have gone down to death for its object with the smile of eternal triumph upon the lips, answered by a smile from the heart of its heart.

Mrs. Douglas knelt beside Margaret, with an arm about her waist, and something like awe in her voice.

"I cannot advise you, my dear, dear child," she said; "you have gone beyond my power to comprehend; but God will surely be with you; I know He will."

Margaret lifted her pale, passion-swept face with the instinct of gathering faith. "He will, He will! do not doubt that He will! He gave me the power to love, and He understands. It may be all wrong, but if it is, He knows how to take care of wrong people just the same as He takes care of those that are—calmer and right. I don't think I am a very good Christian, Mother Hetty, but I do believe that."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Yandell left Newport with his son, he was in a frame of mind which an enemy might have pitied.

The future seemed to hold little for him except regret and remorse. Roy was the one bright spot amid the desolations of heart and home, and to him the strong man clung as the shipwrecked cling to a passing spar, while the great ship of Fate bore down upon him from the stormy horizon of a sea of engulfing facts.

The first move that they made was to the quiet little village of Littleton, on their way to the mountains. Here in sight of the distant hills, rugged and barren at their summits as the climax of his own sad experience, Yandell made an effort to pull himself together and lay plans for the coming years.

With his boy he talked over some of his

own experiences when he first set out as a traveller, seeking by graphic word-paintings of places and people to draw forth some expression of preference which should determine their place of residence for the next year at least.

One day it was England, the next it was Germany or Italy, then it was some other country which Yandell's descriptions had made more attractive than either; and finally they decided upon Saint Jean de Luz in the shadow of the Pyrenees. They would go there for the winter and settle down, the boy to his studies, and his father to the duties of tutor and the interests afforded him by his pencils and brush.

There, with the enchanting blue of the lake for a foreground, and the distant purple of the mountains at their back, like a walled fortress dividing them from the world which Yandell so heartily wished to renounce, they would live in dual quietness—and perchance forgetfulness.

It was decided that they should sail not later than the first of October, as soon as the

lad had gained the additional strength needed to resist the trying effects of a long sea-voyage. Three or four weeks of the mountain air for him—then farewell, America! farewell, home! farewell, love!

Like his own death-knell these farewells rang through Yandell's brain in the order of the writing. It might be years before he would return again, years which would make him a stranger to the land of his birth, a homeless wanderer, a scarcely remembered ghost from a dead and buried past.

At first, he determined not to meet Margaret again; but as days passed, the longing to look upon her face, to see her move with that gliding, caressing grace which was all her own: to hear her voice, whose tones even at a distance suggested an impalpable nearness—to carry away the fragrant recollection of something, inconsequential although it might be, something which she had said or done in the last hours before his departure into exile, grew too strong for resistance; and the argument that such a parting would be like the leave-taking from the dead vanquished the

last of his scruples, with the result which has already been set forth—he wrote to Margaret.

In a few days, he received the following answer to his letter, which began like his own, without headlines:

"I cannot tell you what I have suffered during the last twenty-four hours. I am one who has been dragged through the very flames of a burning hell of doubt and despair, until soul, sense, feeling, hope have succumbed to the suffocating fumes. Uncle Conant and Mother Hetty know all—everything! Do not blame them too cruelly, for they love me; they do indeed! Never doubt that, Alex. If I were their own flesh and blood they could not love me more. But I am to them what a rebellious young eaglet, with soaring, unquiet instincts, would be to a domestic brood. The flights of passion upon which I am borne by the wings of my heart are just as incomprehensible to them as the love of the untamed bird for the unassailable places of nature and air to the homely fowl. Yet I cannot fly away and leave them! I cannot do that—and I am

not sure that you would uphold me in doing it if I could. What am I saying! I know that you would not! You would bid me return, submit my wild pinions to the singeing flames of domestic and conventional traditions, and settle into a life of apathetic resignation. I have anticipated you, Alex, and I obey you.

"My heart is broken; my spirit is dead; life is a burden; immortality a haunting superstition; and even my faith in God's ultimate mercy to man so frail a thing that the next breath of suffering may dispel it altogether, leaving me nothing but chaotic despair. Forgive me—but God and his angels pity me, if you forget me,

"MARGARET."

Yandell had felt his cup of bitterness full to the brim before he received Margaret's letter; but he had not even dreamed of the possible anguish in the overflow.

For all the long, dragging hours of a night which seemed interminable he walked beneath the star-flecked immensity of eternal space—on, on, sensing the exhilaration of movement, but unresponsive and dumb to the

solemn grandeur of what lay around him, until day, like a radiant creature born from the embrace of the night, sprang out of the womb of the east, flaunting her pink and gold loveliness into his face with a wooing caress which thrilled his heart into struggling consciousness.

With a long, awakening breath he inhaled the fragrant, dewy perfume of the bewitching young syren's personality, drinking in long draughts of the refreshment which she offered with the generous impartiality of a wanton coquette.

"The morning is beautiful," he involuntarily exclaimed; and the compliment brought him more kisses, dewy and warm. His enchantress seemed bent upon making him confess that it is something to live, though living meant nothing more than yielding soul and sense to the ravishments of nature.

With immediate consciousness came the straggling sense of his son's surprise and dismay, when awakened, to find that his father's bed had not been touched for the night; and the instinct of love for his boy quickened

Yandell's footsteps as he retraced his way to the nearest farm-house.

He had lost all sense of the distance that he had travelled in that night's walk, and was surprised to be told that he was still ten full miles from the point of his starting. By a generous offer of money, however, he secured the use of a horse from his informant, and reached his hotel before breakfast was served, but not before Roy had discovered his absence.

"I received most important news last night, which made sleep out of the question," he said to his boy, "and I have spent the time out-of-doors."

"I hope that it was nothing annoying—or wrong from home, sir."

"Nothing whatever," his father replied; "it was of an entirely different nature—a private matter of my own, about which I shall tell you in time—a few years hence, when you are old enough to see the matter with judgment."

And with this promise the boy was content, although his heart was sorely grieved by the

set, drawn lines of suffering about the fine lips and brow.

In that night's struggle with self—the good man with the earth man, the immortal with the mortal, spirit with passion, the triumph of the former had been quite signal and complete.

Yandell had determined to respect the position which Margaret had taken: he would go away without seeing her again; indeed, there was nothing else to be done. Anything else would have been the most culpable weakness, he felt.

But he wrote her a letter of farewell, and at the same time wrote to the colonel.

His letter to Margaret was brief:

"Good-bye, Margaret, heart of my heart, my soul's companion, my other and immortal self—good-bye. I have never been a praying man, but for your sake I shall become one. I will not deny to you, however, that I have done most desperate battle with the temptations of the flesh—the longing for the mere possession of your warm human self, your soul

incarnated in the form of a lovely and beloved human personality; but it would not be enough. Love demands the absolute! Less would be gratification, but not happiness; the one fleeting as the moments; the other eternal as the ages. It is to the omnipotence of this fact that I submit, that we must both submit. Good-bye, Margaret; good-bye, dear heart."

To the colonel he wrote:

"FRIEND CONANT, I must see you before I leave America. I must be permitted to do both Margaret and myself the justice of a plain-spoken interview with you. We, my boy Roy and I, sail October 2; and meantime I am yours to command. Please convey my sincerest regards to Mrs. Douglas, and believe me,

"Faithfully yours,

"ALEX YANDELL."

The interview which followed with the colonel, by appointment, in New York, need not be set forth in detail; it was but a repetition of the main facts of this history, the cogent

reasons which emphasized their hopelessness, and the impossibility of escape by the conventional gateway of divorce; no new developments, and nothing changed; nothing in fact gained except the renewed confidence of the rather conservative colonel, who regretted without wholly understanding the wretched entanglement, with all its collateral unhappiness.

The day for sailing came. Yandell and Roy were early on board the steamer. The day was a rather gray one, a subdued October morning, when soft clouds hung low over the distant sky, lifting here and there into a delicate mass of pearly fleece, through which the sun made a perceptible effort to show its face —a tender, refined day, whose softened tints seemed like the delicate shading of a sensitive woman's sympathy.

Yandell stood by the railing of the steamer's deck, with his son at his side, not a person present to see him off; he had avoided the possibility by maintaining silence concerning his intentions. They were watching the last preparations of the ship's officials in a

rather inconsequential way, turning now and then to look at the new arrivals, or to witness the leave-taking from some happy group, whose friends were demonstrative enough to attract strangers' notice amid the general bustle and confusion.

Roy had by some subtle divination found out that his father would prefer not to talk, and he forebore disturbing him with questions.

Not more than twenty minutes remained before the gang-plank would be pulled in, when a closed carriage rolled up and a gentleman and lady alighted quickly—the colonel and Margaret.

Yandell saw them, with a start which was impossible of analysis, so conflicting were its inspirations, pain and delight commingling. He started forward.

Roy, whose eyes had followed his father's, and whose quick young sense had taken in the violent surprise caused by the newcomers, did not move or attempt to follow. He would not presume to do so unless invited by his father, and for the time Yandell had

forgotten him and everything except the one potent, overwhelming fact that Margaret was coming toward him—that she had defied custom, conventionality, everything, to bid him farewell—or to cast her own lot with his!

Could it be? No! If it were, would he accept the sacrifice? But there she was, holding out her hand to him.

She was clothed in black, plainly as a nun with a little black bonnet, from which her face looked out with a kind of white resignation upon nearer view. She was slightly nervous, and yet reserved—full of characteristic, restless passion, but so controlled and steadied by the effort of her will as to be entirely hidden from one who did not sound the very deeps of her wonderfully expressive eyes.

The colonel said hurriedly, in a low voice: "You better have this farewell out alone by yourselves. There is just time enough for a five minutes' good-bye. You are both too well known to society reporters for any leave-takings here. Go to your state-room, Yandell."

Obeying, Yandell offered his arm to Margaret and quickly led her away, the colonel fol-

lowing as a matter of course. But at the state-room door, he paused.

"Wasn't that your boy with you? I'll find him, and tell him that we are friends. I'll bring him here so that Margaret may bid him good-bye when she comes to the saloon. Remember your promise, little woman—everything quiet! No scenes at the last moment!"

"I'll remember, uncle," replied Margaret.

Yandell closed the door, and they were alone.

Neither spoke. They simply stood like two starved creatures, devouring each other with their eyes—drinking in immortal draughts of remembrance. Then Yandell took Margaret's hand, pulled the glove from it gently, and raised it to his lips, holding it there, with bowed head. When he looked at her again, the great warm tears stood in her eyes.

"Good-bye," he said, hoarsely.

"Good-bye," she breathed, in reply, with quivering lips.

"God keep you."

"And you."

"Just once, Margaret."

Yandell put his arm about her, and held her with the passion of sorrow; no less than love, to his heart. He kissed her forehead, her eyelids, her cheeks, her lips.

"It would have been too much, Margaret; mortals could not have borne such perfectness," he whispered, as he put her out of his arms.

When they stepped into the saloon, the colonel and Roy were there.

"Five minutes more in which to get off this boat. Here, Margaret, is Yandell's boy—the little fellow who just escaped the old Tyrant himself. He has been telling me about it, and I have been telling him what good friends we all are."

Margaret took the lad's hand.

"Then this is Roy," she said, with a deeply sweet smile, which reminded him of a pictured face.

"Papa's own boy;" said Yandell, with an answering smile.

"Come, come; we must be going or we shall be carried off," said the colonel. "Good-bye, Yandell; *bon voyage!* Good-bye, Roy; I wish

I had a nice young fellow like you to take me off to Europe."

"Come with us, sir."

"I wish I could."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Margaret leaned over impulsively and kissed the lad.

"I feel as if I had always known you, because I have heard papa say so much about you," she said.

Five minutes later the great steamer swung off from her wharf amid a grand shout from the merry crowds on shore, and the waving of the gay little handkerchiefs of the pleasure-seekers on board

Inside their carriage, with drawn curtains, Margaret sat with clenched hands, an occasional moan of despair escaping her through rebellious lips, until the colonel drew her head to his shoulder, so tenderly that the fountains of pent-up grief gave way in a flood of grateful tears.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT is left a woman like Margaret when love is no longer hope, faith, or inspiration?

Religious women find spiritual consolations; the philanthropic will often turn successfully to humanitarian work; calm natures generally forget—these are the average women who marry other men; violent ones sometimes rudely sever the link of life. But Margaret belonged to neither class. She was reverent, but not deeply religious; she was enthusiastically generous, but her earlier dabbling in philanthropics had proven to all intents and purposes that she could not get satisfaction out of immediate, personal contact with suffering, even for the purpose of relieving it; she gave freely of her purse, but shrank from giving herself. She was too passionately tenacious in her affections to hope for the blessed oblivion of forgetfulness; the thought of marry-

ing any man except Yandell would have been criminal to her; and she was too courageous to think of escaping her sorrow by ending her own life.

Of all women she seemed the most unfortunate, for there was absolutely nothing before her but unrelieved endurance. She could not even reason out a routine of life which should occupy all her time.

Sometimes it occurred to her that she might go mad, and thus forget; but there was little probability of that, since no relative, near or remote, had ever suffered from mental aberration, and her suffering of the last few months had resulted in no greater physical deterioration than a rather pale, wan face, and hollow, pathetic eyes with haunting shadows around them.

It was plain that she might lose her beauty and power of attraction, which were her only consolations *per se* in the life that was left to her—the life of social triumph and friendship, without forgetting or lessening material anguish.

It would be impossible to analyze the com-

plex emotions which alternately swayed Margaret Blaine during these first weeks of loss; their subtle shadings were as elusive and impossible of description as the peep of an unnamed sunset color through a vivid horizon. While one looked it faded, never to return, or, remaining fixed for any length of time, baffled by the inscrutable quality of its own individuality. There are women like Margaret, but they are not typical. I have known two others, creatures of passionate impulses. One of this trio I have seen happily married to a noble man, and as an honored wife I have seen her queen over a domestic and social circle, the first in the land—the ideal woman and wife, the devoted mother, the steadfast friend, broad in her charities, liberal in her opinions, modest in her personality, giving and receiving with divine spontaneity. The other I have seen like a gem torn from its setting, a pearl cast under the trampling feet of swine—crushed, ruined, forsaken, outcast! a thing over which gods and men might mourn; and I have before me the emotional prototype of each, swaying helpless in the

orbit of her own despair, and the end uncertain as the possible revolutions of fate!

At Glenmere the castle was closed for the season; and the colonel, with Mrs. Douglas and Margaret, had come up to their town house for the winter. But nothing seemed changed with the passionate sufferer as time went on. She maintained, however, a kind of desperate courage and resignation in the face of the world in which she was a figure, without pretending to herself that her misery had or could lighten in the least.

The family were gathered in the breakfast-room, no one present but themselves, being without guests at the time. The season was December, the day Thursday. Mrs. Douglas was saying something wholly unimportant about the coming season's social promise, the colonel was sipping his coffee, Margaret was listlessly scanning the morning paper.

She had begun at the back page, and after quoting some commercial notes of interest to the colonel, mentioned a western blizzard, the weather probabilities, the death of a very old Shakespearean scholar, whose days had

been covered with honors, and a half-dozen other minor items of possible interest. In turning the paper she came naturally to the first page. In exaggerated type were these headlines:

"Horrible Railroad Accident!—Forty Persons Killed and Wounded!—Full Particulars of the Fatality!—List of the Dead and Dying."

She uttered a little shocked, involuntary exclamation. The colonel and Mrs. Douglas both looked up in inquiry.

"Another wretched accident on a railroad between this city and the West," Margaret said, in explanation. "It seems as if these horrors increase in numbers. I must read the list of the dead and injured to be sure that no friend of ours is among them."

She read aloud a half-dozen unknown names, then looked up, saying:

"There seem to be so many needless forms of suffering. One must needs be more than a philosopher to understand why certain people should become victims of such

a miserable, violent end—as this, for example."

"The ways of Providence are past finding out, but there must be some good purpose in it all, else it would not be," said Mrs. Douglas.

"I wish that I could see it that way," replied Margaret, with a note of weary scepticism in her voice. "I know that it is the popular view, the one to which youth is generally educated, without much regard for the reason of things; but I cannot see it."

"We are compelled to admit what is."

"Yes, that; but not the reasons, when there seems to be no reason whatever in the reasons given."

"If mortals were permitted to interpret the divine plan of human life, the least among us might become the peers of gods. I am afraid, Margaret, that what we need is more faith and less disposition to rebel against the decrees of the higher wisdom."

"But surely," persisted the girl, "you do not pretend that faith makes the criminal negligence or carelessness of those who are

responsible for such an accident as this a virtue for which we must needs praise heaven. For my part, I should think that Divinity would weep at such a sight as this," shud deringly, "of a mother and her babe slowly roasting to death beneath crushed timbers from which no human hand could extricate them—or this, of a poor little fellow— Oh, God!"

A wild shriek of absolute horror and anguish burst from Margaret's lips, and the paper fluttered to the floor from her nerveless grasp.

The colonel and Mrs. Douglas both sprang to their feet in dismay.

"What is it? Who is it, Margaret? Speak. Here, drink this," holding a glass of water to her lips, as she swayed in her chair.

She swallowed a few drops of the water, which seemed to burn her like a fiery liquid, then thrust it away.

"I am all—right!" she gasped, clutching at the neck of her dress, as if to free her throat from a choking hand. "Read! read! His—they—all—dead!"

The colonel picked up the newspaper and read, changing color visibly.

Stripped of verbiage, what he read was: "Dead, Bertha Yandell, aged seven; Millie Yandell, aged ten. Dying, Edgar Yandell, aged twelve; and severely injured so that recovery is extremely doubtful, Mrs. Alex Yandell."

All, except Roy.

In the early days of her unhappiness Margaret had pictured the possible taking off by the natural course of disease of the woman who stood between herself and love; and the guilty recollection came back to her now like a mocking, pitiless fiend. She felt a cruel voice at her ear hissing—"Murderess!"

"Pity me!" she cried, in wild-eyed despair.

"No pity for you! you wanted her dead," said the voice.

Like a convicted wretch she crouched beneath the curdling horror of this accusation.

"When she is dead, he will be free."

Where was the exultation in the thought? Why did not the frozen despair in her veins turn into the wine of rejoicing?

"You can marry him then!"

"Spare me! spare me!"

"That is what you wanted—what you have prayed for!" fiendishly whispered the voice.

Margaret crouched away.

"You wanted her to die—the devil knew it; this is the devil's work! He is in league with women like yourself."

"Women like myself! What—am—I—like?"

"See the picture—what you prayed for! You wanted her dead—dead!"

"I did not! I did not want her dead!"

She had risen with palms pressed to her bursting head, with panting lips and straining eyes.

"You wanted him—free! free!" pursued the haunting voice; "you know that you did."

"But I did not want her dead—I did not want her—dead!"

"A fine distinction—an infinitesimal distinction," said the mocking voice.

"Help me! help me!"

"The devil helped you—he was your

friend! You didn't believe in God's mercy. Too late, too late!"

Margaret uttered a piercing shriek, which moaned into weird, bodiless silence, like the last wail of a lost soul.

"Father! help, help! keep me from becoming—a murderess."

Mother Hetty put a pair of forcible but tender arms around the suffering, pantherish creature, and stopped her in her mad pacing up and down the room.

"It is natural that this should be horrible to you, my dear girl; but you are certainly not to blame. It is worse than morbid to so accuse yourself."

"But why should she die—why?" demanded Margaret, wildly.

"Because it is God's time, which neither you nor I may question," said Mrs. Douglas, solemnly.

"Don't say that to me!—don't tell me that this is God's work! It is the devil's!—and I was his accomplice, or he mine! Yes, he was mine; I had more to gain—I had all to gain—he, nothing but this miserable, pitiful soul,

which one would think that even a devil would scorn!"

"Margaret, you shock me," said Mrs. Douglas, tearfully.

"I must, I must! There is nothing on earth more shocking than a woman who wanted another woman dead to get her husband from her!"

Margaret burst from Mrs. Douglas' encircling arm and resumed her fierce pacing to and fro.

"For heaven's sake, Margaret!" cried the colonel, "what has this frightful catastrophe to do with you? One would suppose you had been the deliberate cause of a misplaced switch, to hear you go on."

"It is just as bad!—just as bad! I used to think that she might die!"

"But that did not kill her," said the colonel, almost harshly.

"But it was in my thought!—and now she is dead—dead!"

"This account does not say so; it says she is injured, but not dead."

"But she will die; I know she will."

"You don't know anything of the kind; such reports are always exaggerated more or less. It is the children who are dead, and you certainly did not wish them any such fate."

"No! no! no! God knows I never thought of them dead," said Margaret, in a voice of terrible anguish, covering her face with trembling hands to shut out the mental sight.

"Then I do not see but you are distressing yourself unreasonably. Be calm, and I will immediately telegraph for all particulars. Matters may be much better than you think."

Margaret shook her head, and moaned in heart-broken doubt, then suddenly caught at the straw of hope. She faced the colonel with desperate beseeching.

"Don't deceive me, Uncle Conant; promise me you will not try to spare me by doing that! If she is dead you will tell me the truth—the whole ghastly truth! every word of it. You will not keep back a word of the damning evidence against me—I must know! If I have killed her with my thought—tell me

so! Oh, Uncle! pity me, but tell me, and let me expiate the sin with my own miserable, worthless life!"

"I will promise to tell you the whole truth, Margaret," the colonel replied; "nothing would be gained by keeping it from you."

"No, nothing would be gained," she repeated, with gruesome sagacity. "I should know."

Colonel Conant put the unhappy girl's clinging, feverish hands from his shoulder, and left the room.

"Now, dear," said Mrs. Douglas, with a little motherly air, "you must try to compose yourself until Uncle Conant returns. It will be several hours before an answer comes to his telegram; and meanwhile you must go to your chamber and quiet your nerves. If you would like, I will go with you."

"How good you are to me!" said Margaret, with one of her characteristic melting caresses. "And you will love me just the same, no matter what comes—even if she should—die."

Her voice had sunk to a pleading, awe-

stricken whisper, and her face was full of the pathos of a bruised lily.

"Yes, dear, I shall love you just the same. Come."

The colonel returned late in the afternoon, having several telegrams with him, the sum and substance of which was, in brief, that Yandell's wife was still living, and might recover with careful nursing. The children, however, were all dead, the boy Edgar having succumbed to his injuries, after lingering several hours. The telegrams stated that the great need in the little town to which the sufferers had been taken was for skilful nursing, the railroad officials having so far been unable to secure sufficient numbers of trained nurses, who could be relied upon to bear up under the trying horrors of their duties.

Margaret had risen when the colonel entered the room, her excitement being too dense for sitting quietly through the reading of the telegrams. She stood with clasped hands and a strained effort at self-control, until he had concluded; then turning to Mrs. Douglas with passionate breath, she broke into pleading.

"You do believe God will forgive me, that He will be merciful to me!—you do believe it, Mother Hetty. Oh! say you do believe it—that you believe she will live!"

"I hope so, dear."

"But you do not believe it!" faltered Margaret, pitiably.

"I cannot *know;* but, yes—I do *believe* it."

Margaret burst into hysterical sobbing which was like the breaking up of summer clouds when refreshing showers begin to fall.

"You are so good to me, Mother Hetty! You have always been so good to me," she whispered, through the blurring tears which fell faster and faster, until her overflowing misery seemed relieved.

In the meantime neither the colonel nor Mrs. Douglas disturbed this mood. These poor, perplexed souls waited in a species of helpless conjecture about what she would do next. The events of the last few months had worn upon them both, and Margaret's passionate contradictions, her alternate swaying from one extreme to the other—from virtue to indulgence, had been a sore trial to their

straightforward, rather rigid creeds. But if they could not understand the excitable and untamed creature, and enter fully into the unusual complications of her peculiar organization, they could and did love her fondly, and for this reason sought in a whole-hearted way to save and spare her at the same time.

Before this time they had both agreed that nothing she might say or do could ever surprise them again; nevertheless it was a matter of the greatest surprise, the very last suggestion of the unexpected, when Margaret announced through glistening tears, that she must secure the services of a nurse from the training school, who would be ready to start westward with her that very night.

Mother Hetty was thrown away off her natural complacent bias and fairly leaped to her feet in consternation, gasping out her surprise in a rather inarticulate way, while the colonel gave vent to the sharp, involuntary expletive—

"Quixotic nonsense!"

But Margaret was too much in earnest to be offended, or even nonplussed.

"It is all the hope that is left me, Uncle Conant," she said, with the intense conviction of one whose position was invincible. "It is my one hope of salvation. Her life must be saved!"

"And do you doubt that her own friends will do all, and more for her than you could hope to do?"

"They will do all they can," Margaret acquiesced, "but they could not save her!—that is my work. It is heaven's chance to redeem my soul from a damning sin! Don't try to influence me against it; don't, I beseech you—it would not avail, and it makes it all the harder for me. My place is there, and I must go, though every mile of the way were blocked with terrors and remonstrance. I must!—don't you see that I must?"

"No, I do not see it," said the colonel, very decidedly. "It looks to me like a fool's errand. You haven't the nerve and composure for that sort of thing, if there were no other reasons to be urged against it, which there are—a dozen."

But Margaret was determined, and neither objections nor prayers availed to change her

mind. The colonel, groaning inwardly at the vagaries and freaks which made this young woman seem the most incomprehensible of all her sex, prepared to accompany her when he found that her purpose was unalterable.

But no religious devotee on his way to visit the shrine of a saint was ever dominated by a holier enthusiasm than possessed this beautiful pilgrim of passion on her way to the bedside of her suffering rival. No martyr ever shed his blood more freely than Margaret would have given her own heart's blood to nourish the life-spark in the breast of the woman who separated her from love.

The unfaltering courage with which this frail thing of earth put aside her own personality day by day, during the long, dreary weeks in which she hung over the bed of Gerta Yandell, must have washed every stain from the tablet of her soul, leaving it pure as an angel's confessional ; and when consciousness came back to the injured woman, and she asked in her weak perplexity—"Who are you?" Margaret replied—

"One to whom God has been good."

CHAPTER X.

When Gerta Yandell was out of danger Margaret slipped away as unexpectedly as she had come, without disclosing her name or secret; and the sick woman whom she had followed through the very valley of the shadow of death was left to suppose her a professional nurse. To be sure, she wondered over Margaret's beauty and refined, high-bred carriage somewhat, but it did not occur to her to doubt that the white cap and apron which she wore in the sick-room were enforced badges of her servitude, and she regarded Margaret in this connection as one of the occasional persons to be found among the lower classes who really seem superior to their station.

By a strange coincidence Yandell arrived the very day after Margaret left. His former determination not to see his wife again had

yielded to the horror of the wretched bereavement which she had suffered, and to pity for her personal injuries. He felt that it would be little less than brutal to ignore her claims upon his sympathy at such a time, and moreover, the unfortunate man was deeply moved by the horrible fate of his children.

Roy too, with the impetuous warmth of a loyal young heart, had begged to go to his mother.

But this return to his wife meant nothing hopeful to Yandell. He did not seek to deceive himself into believing that their common loss would bring them any nearer together. His coming was the natural impulse of a tender and generous nature, and in taking the step he could not foresee what the end would be, nor even how he would be able to comfort the miserable woman; indeed, it may as well be stated that his thoughts were like his hopes—chaotic! It seemed the right thing to him to go to her, and for this reason he went.

The convalescent however. evinced neither surprise nor pleasure at his coming. She was still in a nervous and overwrought state,

and was for the time inclined to grumble over the departure of Margaret, whose magnetic touch and patient tenderness and devotion had proven especially grateful to her; and the first two days following Yandell's return were spent in vain efforts to trace the nurse Mariana, and bribe her into returning to her post. All efforts proving unavailing, however, Yandell gave himself up to the work of anticipating and fulfilling the querulous woman's wants, as far as possible. He became almost loverlike in his solicitousness and care for her comfort; and with the most exquisite delicacy forebore to recall the past in any form which might annoy or distress her. Once or twice she mentioned their dead children, but with such horror and shuddering that Yandell soon came to regard all allusion to them as unwise; and then, with masterly self-control on the one side, and characteristic selfishness on the other, the broken threads of domestic life were reunited between this deplorably mated couple, and the wear and tear upon soul and body was begun again, with harrowing re-

membrances for a background, and blank hopelessness ahead.

The journey eastward to their Newport house, which was undertaken early in May, by which time Mrs. Yandell had entirely recovered from her injuries, except for a rather stiff shoulder and arm, was as dreary an affair as one could imagine. Going home meant so little to any one of this melancholy trio, for even Roy felt the general depression; and as if to add to the gloom of unhappiness, Mrs. Yandell travelled in a state of nervous fear and apprehension which kept everybody about her on the rack of possibility.

The trip was, however, accomplished without accident or incident of importance, except for a stop of several days at New York, where the bereaved woman was put into the mourning which circumstances demanded; her strictly conventional ideas of what was due to her position as one of the elect being altogether opposed to appearing at church or in her carriage in western made gowns and bonnets.

But once at home under the uneventful

routine of life which the period of mourning entailed, the miseries of uncongeniality seemed more poignant than ever. Yandell nevertheless resolutely set himself to the task of teaching his son, and each day put in some good work on a painting, the subject of which had been furnished by a family tradition handed down from colonial days. The tradition was that of a brave young English girl who followed her lover across the seas to become his bride, at the sacrifice of friends and fortune.

The painting, which was a large one, represented the meeting of these lovers, and their simple wedding on the barren New England shores. Yandell had begun the work long before, but had made no effort to complete it until now; and although he painted rapidly, it was late in the summer before the work was finished. There was much detail, which he wrought out assiduously and with great nicety, neglecting nothing that would add to artistic excellence or the historical faithfulness of the earlier colonial surroundings.

But apart from the hours daily given to his

son and to this work of his genius, Yandell put his time entirely at his wife's disposal. He appeared at church with her regularly on Sundays; rode with her every week-day; devoted his evenings to her almost without exception; and listened to dreary monologues about one commonplace thing and another, with a forced air of interest for long hours together. He tried with energy to enter into the spirit of the gossip which she got second-hand from her servants; and very generally submitted his neck to the galling yoke of the most subservient matrimonial slavery, all the time under the belief that he could choose no better part for himself, since it was his own mistakes which had led to this; nevertheless, to a third person, there was something almost pitiful in this sight of a strong man yielding his entire individuality as a sacrifice to the negative contentment of a weak, selfish, and thoroughly unappreciative woman.

But Yandell's horizon of hope had narrowed down to his son's future and to his own ability to continue in his present life with the dignity and courage of a man. Margaret Blaine he

believed to be like one's holy dead, buried within the sepulchre of memory, never to be resurrected this side of eternity. Existence to him meant endurance, and endurance demanded work.

Neither his wife nor son had seen Yandell's picture in process of painting, and when it was completed he invited them both to view the finished work. Roy had been filled with excitement over his father's labors, and had looked forward to this hour with eager anticipation; even Mrs. Yandell had felt some curiosity, although she could not understand concentrated devotion to any art, unless one needed to earn one's bread that way. Nevertheless, when the hour came for unveiling the picture, she exhibited more interest than had been her wont to show in what engaged her husband's finer faculties.

Yandell had arranged his easel with scrupulous regard for a good light, carefully as if he were exhibiting to the art critics who could make or unmake his reputation; and he had added a few fine touches to his studio in the way of flowers, out of a certain instinctive

delicacy of compliment to the occasion which brought his wife and son there, such poetic touches being native to him. Then he went himself to fetch them. Taking Mrs. Yandell by the hand, he led her into position to get a perfect view of the painting, and awaited her comments with an assumed air of expectancy that her remarks would prove both profound and important—an air which he was learning to use as the one most gratifying to her vain and shallow nature; the very last and most pathetic of all his resorts to please her, and secure to himself the negative happiness of respite from constant bickering.

He expected some such commonplace as—"That's very nice," or "How beautiful!" or some other of the same category, since she had come with him in a very good humor indeed; but he was utterly dumbfounded at her short, sharp, involuntary exclamation, which was almost dramatic in force and surprise.

"Why, you have painted that nurse Mariana!"

Yandell looked at her blankly.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"I never saw the nurse Mariana, and how could I have painted her? The resemblance is purely accidental."

"It is the most remarkable of accidents," said his wife, rather hotly.

"So it seems," replied Yandell, annoyed in spite of himself at his wife's evident pique.

Roy, who was too absorbed in contemplation of the picture to realize with his usual boyish intuition that any remark from him would prove unfortunate, burst out in a species of rapturous discovery,

"I know who it is! She is the beautiful lady that came to the steamer with the old gentleman."

Yandell uttered an exclamation under his breath, and took a step nearer to his own work; when he saw for the first time, what both his wife and son had discovered at a glance, that in the young English bride he had painted a perfect likeness of Margaret Blaine. The discovery staggered him, and he stood in a dazed and rather helpless way, staring at this remarkable production of his own hands.

What startled him was the evidence that Margaret had become so much a part of his immortal being that he reflected her naturally and unconsciously as his ideal; that she grew out of his personality as a part of its genius; that she was the fruit and flower on the stem of life, springing into tangible form in whatever he undertook; that she was the ever-present fragrant reality of the absolute and unconquerable passion of love.

But Mrs. Yandell, who had been watching the workings of his face with the jealous sense of an unsolved mystery, now spoke up with sharp emphasis:

"You seem to have discovered a likeness between this lady and some other, which surprises you."

"Yes," Yandell admitted, slowly and thoughtfully. "I have discovered—a—likeness—which—surprises—me."

"Since the resemblance is so perfect that I am compelled to recognize my nurse Mariana, perhaps you will not object to telling me when and where you had the honor of the lady's

acquaintance," continued his wife, with frigid sarcasm.

"Don't talk nonsense, Gerta," said Yandell; almost roughly, "that lady is not a nurse. I have told you that you are mistaken in the resemblance."

"As you have painted her here, I see that she figures as a bride; as I knew her she was a professional nurse. I should know that face anywhere—and I think I understand now why you did not find her when you *tried so hard*."

"Gerta, I certainly think that you are the most unalterably foolish creature that I have ever met in my life," Yandell said, not attempting to conceal his impatience. "You imagine all sorts of impossible things, without sense or reason. I tell you again, that any resemblance which you may detect between this woman in the painting and your former nurse is purely accidental."

"And I tell you that I should recognize that face and the peculiar poise of that head anywhere in the world," persisted Mrs. Yandell, with irritating elaborateness. "If you

have had an intrigue with this pretty underling, which you are ashamed to own up to, that is one thing; but to attempt to argue me out of my senses is quite another. You must excuse me if I refuse to permit it. But you need never fear my being jealous of a servant. I know that *gentlemen* are sometimes given that way; especially gentlemen who find living at home with their wives irksome."

"Roy, leave the room."

Yandell spoke hoarsely, for he was profoundly wrought up by the combination of circumstances which was staring him in the face.

Roy was pale and distressed.

"Come with me, father," he pleaded.

"I will follow you soon," Yandell replied, taking the boy gently but firmly by the shoulder, to lead him to the door.

While this by-play with their son was going on, his wife stood idly toying with a silken scarf which hung over the back of a chair, a disagreeable, insolent smile upon her face.

"Now, Gerta," said Yandell, facing her

with a species of dogged determination, "tell me more about this nurse, Mariana."

"Oh, I have nothing to tell. You are the one to tell *me* more about her," said Mrs. Yandell, shruggingly, settling the folds of her dead black gown with an air of maddening insinuation. "You are the one evidently who *knows her*. To me she was nothing more than a very well trained nurse; to you she seems to have been the one being in the world whose form and features you have found worthy to be portrayed as the English heroine, your ancestor. But it was a strange coincidence that your—inamorata should have become your wife's nurse."

Yandell colored deeply.

"I scorn your sneers, Gerta, concerning this lady, whose face I have unconsciously painted out of memory," he said, bitterly, "and I care even less for your implied insults to myself. I have borne this sort of thing so many years that it is losing its force through familiarity. But I should like to know more about the nurse Mariana, for your insistence upon the resemblance between the face which

I have painted and the woman who nursed you back to life and health makes me believe that the original of my inspiration has proven herself the noblest and most unselfish of women."

Mrs. Yandell arched her brows odiously, while a gleam of savage, jealous rage darted from her small eyes.

"You must think that this kind of sensational rhapsody over a low-born creature, is interesting to me," she said, with a sneer. "If I do not interfere with your intrigues, one would suppose that I might at least be secure from hearing you gush over them."

"Gerta, are you a woman or a fiend, that you should wish to tantalize a man into madness?" Yandell burst out in livid desperation. "If I had been guilty of every sin in the Decalogue, you could not have been more meanly suspicious of me. I tell you, once for all, that I have borne your sneers and taunts until patience has ceased to be a virtue; and I swear I will bear them no longer! From this hour you may go your way, and I'll go mine."

Mrs. Yandell burst into a low, rasping laugh.

"You are original to the end, Alex," she said, ironically. "Separating from me is something so *new*—going your own way is something so unusual."

Yandell had, however, turned his back upon her entirely; and with pale brow and compressed lips, stood before the work of his brush, gazing at the tender, passionate, trustful face of the girl bride whose lineaments were Margaret's.

For a moment Mrs. Yandell watched him balefully like a cat; then, in a whirlwind of jealousy, she sprang forward, wordless, and slashed the face of the woman on the canvas, through and through, with a jewelled dagger snatched from her hair.

Yandell sensed what she had done with a smothered cry of indignation, and seizing her by the wrist involuntarily, he flung himself between her and the picture. It was all the work of a moment, but in that moment a tragedy had been enacted, for Mrs. Yandell's foot slipped on the polished floor, and she fell

upon her side, pierced to the hilt by the jewelled toy with which she had ruined the pictured face of the woman who had so recently saved her life.

"Gerta! Gerta!" cried Yandell, dropping on his knees to raise her, while Roy and a maid rushed to the spot, attracted by the wild shriek uttered by the injured woman when she fell. "Gerta, Gerta, speak to me!"

Yandell raised the senseless woman in his arms. The jewelled hilt of the murderous dagger was clutched in a deathlike and rigid grasp in her right hand, while its slender point still quivered in her bleeding side.

The maid was wild with fright; and Roy stood as if rooted to the spot with frozen horror, until Yandell, overwhelmed by this latest link in the horrible chain of circumstances which bound him to the inquisitorial rack of fate, hoarsely bade him summon a doctor.

The agony which Alex Yandell suffered during the next hour, turned his hair white as the snows which rest in frozen silence upon the inaccessible mountain places. It seemed to him as if the yawning gates of perdition

had opened to swallow up the results of all his efforts to live at peace with God and his fellow-creatures. He felt the scorching hands of fiends at his heart-strings, and heard their blood-red laughter in his singing ears, while he bent in anxious misery above the couch upon which his wife lay senseless—and dying, he believed.

It was but a short time before a surgeon arrived; and Yandell wept like a child when told that the wound need not necessarily prove fatal, although there was no denying that it was most serious.

"I don't know why women always choose such infernal, unaccountable styles of ornaments," said the brusque old doctor; "snakes and scorpions and daggers and all the rest of the jewelled monstrosities. They'd stuff their poodles and stick 'em full of jewels to wear on their heads as they do birds, if they weren't a size too big for it. As it is they wear 'em in their arms. Only last month, I was called to attend a woman who died from a wretched skin disease that had its source in a dog's kisses. Ugh! But

women never will learn sense about such things; I've attended 'em for years, and I know 'em. This ain't the first one I've seen hurt this very way. She slipped and fell, I suppose, with that thing in her hand? Of course! evidence enough here to prove that; but there wasn't any such evidence in the other case, and they suspected the son of helping the thing along! A pretty kettle of fish that was! The poor fellow, besides losing his mother, had hard work to save his own life from the hangman's noose.

"I tell you the devil must get up these things, and the jewellers have a good deal to answer for in the combination. I advise you to burn that infernal thing, and to go through your wife's jewels to see that there ain't any more like it!"

"I pray that she may live to want her other jewels," said Yandell, with a note of deep gloom, receiving the dagger, with its onyx hilt set in brilliants, from the doctor's hand.

"Of course you do," he acquiesced, nodding, "and we propose to save her if no complications set in. Keep up your courage

like a man! I'll send you a nurse who will pull her up if anybody can. She knows all about this kind of a wound, just what to do in an emergency. Damn it, man! you ain't going to break down again, like a school-boy."

But Yandell was swallowing hard to keep back his rising emotion. He felt utterly broken to pieces, and unnerved.

The old doctor eyed him keenly from under his bushy brows, then went to the table and wrote a prescription.

"Look here, you need a little bracing up yourself. Take one of these powders in a half of a wine glass of water before eating, for a couple of days."

Then, softening visibly, and drawing his coat-sleeve hastily across his eyes, he said in a gentler tone,

"She'll have good care, and there ain't much cause to worry; if there was, it wouldn't do any good, man—so brace up."

Yandell wrung his hand for answer, and hastily left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

MARGARET'S experiences at the bedside of Gerta Yandell, together with the circumstances controlling her going there, had been of a kind to call forth the reserved strength of her nature; and it was not long before she began to see the collateral duties and relations of Yandell's life and her own as she had never been them before.

Like some stately tropical tree, springing tall and strong above the rank and tangled undergrowth of noxious weeds and vines that cling about its roots, Margaret's perception of the natural rights of a human soul to breath and air grew and towered out of the strangling, irritating, grovelling reach of the human hordes that swarm on mental lowlands as do poisonous insects in marshy places.

Where she had blindly groped before, she walked with steady feet in the light of her

glowing cognition of infinite truth; where, before, her senses had swayed like the delicate flower of the frail columbine to every passing breath of hope and fear, her heart took courage now, and dauntlessly challenged fate.

She asked: "What are you that I should bow my neck to your cruel and arbitrary rulings? Who is this Mumbo-Jumbo of conventional superstition that I should yield him the arbitration of my immortal destiny, forgetting that I have been made in the image of my Father, with soul, senses, heart, and mind to learn of Him."

Thus it was that Margaret's self unfolded day by day, until the chrysalis burst its covering, and ripened wisdom soared on new-born wings to the lawful places of the soul.

Meanwhile the weeks and months were passing; and Mother Hetty—good, honest, loving creature!—believed that Margaret was finding the pathway to woman's accepted mission of patient endurance in the world. She never once suspected that her feet were set instead upon the royal road that leads the Pilgrim of Passion above the slough of de-

spond. All through the long summer days at Glenmere, while the colonel and Mrs. Douglas were believing that awesome remembrance of "what might have been" had proven Margaret's saving grace, she was peering into a wider book of life, with clearer eyes, and learning, by the revealed light of love's meaning, to wait the perfect time of love's fulfilment.

The colonel and Yandell exchanged occasional letters, and she therefore knew that he was with his wife. But the thought caused her no jealous pang nor passionate revolt. She had learned to look beyond the worldly conceit of the empty title "wife," for she had come to discern the underlying truth that marriage is impossible where love is not. One might better expect the glow-worm to mate with a star, than two antipodal natures to force themselves into the perfect union which alone is marriage.

But Yandell's eyes were still blinded by the massed gloom of dark tradition, and beyond its dense hopelessness he could not see the sacred light which streamed from the windows of Love's Temple, nor feel the beckoning

arms of the High Priestess who waited him at the altar there.

The social life at Glenmere had never been more delightful than this season, and Margaret had led all gayeties as before. There had been more guests than usual, among them a distinguished scholar, and a wit, whose *bon mots* and brilliant sallies had added much to the enjoyments of the dinner-table and drawing-room.

Then there had been two *débutantes*, whose fresh, exhilarating young pleasure in everything had served to renew youth and fire in the sluggish blood of their elders.

October came, and passed, and with it the time for closing Glenmere. But summer traditions still lingered in the air, while the red and gold of autumn were imperceptibly turning into russet brown. A soft haze, delicious as summer's perfect blue, and scarcely more like winter's breath, invited willing feet to loiter still amid field and forest glories; and when the first rustling leaves fluttered to earth with a pensive sighing like the whirr of passing angels' wings, no one was ready to exchange

this subdued and unworldly beauty for the noise and dust and garish glare of the city.

The colonel proposed remaining at the castle for the holidays, in which everybody enthusiastically acquiesced.

"And we will have a regular old-fashioned Thanksgiving dinner, with turkey and plum pudding, and pumpkin pies," the colonel said, "on one condition—"

He paused in tantalizing scrutiny of the eager and expectant group.

"Just one condition," he repeated, as if enjoying their suspense.

"And that is what, Colonel Conant? Do tell us, for we are devoured by anxiety to know if we are equal to its fulfilment," said pretty Madge Grant, dancing up to him with most bewitching entreaty.

"That every woman at Glenmere shall take a part in its cooking."

"That will be jolly," was declared all round.

"We shall see," mine host replied. "But it must be the traditional New England affair of years ago, and no modern French make-

shift, concocted by that ingenious *chef* of mine. I shall take nothing less than the promise that every lady will make a loaf of bread, or concoct a pie, or bake a pound cake, while the turkey dressing and plum pudding must all be the work of your own hands. What do you say to that, young ladies? and do you still wish to remain?"

"Indeed we do," they all cried in chorus.

"I am afraid that it will be a verification of the old adage that too many cooks spoil the broth," one of the older ladies remarked.

"No, indeed it will not, mamma," replied her enthusiastic daughter. "Somebody must have a grandmother who will know all about it; beside, we can, you know, take lessons of Miss Parloa," at which naïve remark everybody smiled. The colonel shook his head warningly.

"None of that! It must all be done in the regular old-fashioned, rollicking New England way—just as it was done when there were no cooking teachers, and *ladies* did not fear to roll up their sleeves and go right in for work."

"But somebody will have to show us just a little, Colonel Conant," Madge Grant announced, with very bright, earnest eyes.

"No," the colonel shook his head, "it must be quite intuitive."

"An intuitive dinner! That evidently means a feast fit for an ostrich. I believe it is they, Colonel, who are credited with the power to digest anything," said Melvin teasingly, with a groan.

"Oh! that is entirely too bad, Mr. Melvin. You deserve to go without your dinner for punishment," said Bessie Foxcroft, reproachfully.

"No, Bess, that would not be half so good as filling his plum pudding full of raisins with the stones in them, or putting the rind of the pumpkin into his pie," promptly declared Madge.

"I'll tell you a better punishment yet, young ladies," said Ruddygore, the wit; "metamorphose Mr. Melvin into the 'skeleton at the feast.'" A shout of merriment followed this sally, in which even its portly and rubicund victim was compelled to join.

"Do not despair, girls, for I can help you out. I know the very loveliest old-school New England gentlewoman, who has very little money now, and she will gladly teach you everything about it; and Uncle Conant need not know at all," Margaret whispered, in confidence.

"And we can give them a big surprise. Won't that be immensely jolly?" said Madge, with a girlish tremor of delight.

"What kind of mischief is brewing over there in that corner?" demanded the colonel, suspiciously, from under his eyebrows.

"Nothing," demurely replied Bess, dropping him a little courtesy of an earlier period.

"Charming! excellent! Miss Bessie, all that you need to make you a perfect Priscilla is a homespun gown and a white neckerchief."

"And you to be clad in doublet and hose, and boots of Cordovan leather, to become the ideal Miles Standish," replied Bessie, in quick repartee to Ruddygore, who had likened her to the Puritan maiden.

"If I might only be John Alden instead," sighed he.

"Nonsense," responded Bessie, promptly, "you're quite too old: John Alden is always described as a stripling, and I am sure I see 'patches of snow in your russet beard.'"

"Golden sunshine, Miss Bessie, caught by reflection from your twinkling eyes."

The *retrousse* of her nose was saucily accentuated by the little grimace which she made him.

"We might have an old-time husking among our Thanksgiving festivities, and a dance in the barn, with a native fiddler to furnish the music," the colonel was saying, at which they all clapped their hands, and declared him the ideal host.

"Won't it be too good sport for anything, Bess?" cried Madge. "A great deal nicer than stiff balls and parties, where it is all etiquette and no fun."

"And we will wear the regular gowns that they used to wear, and do everything that our ancestors did," put in Bess.

"Every single thing," repeated the colonel,

quite seriously, "even to kissing the girls when we find a red ear. Eh? Melvin, how will that be for renewing one's youth?" nudged the colonel.

"Red ears! How? What do you mean about the red ears?" innocently asked Bessie, who had never heard the tradition connected with finding a red ear among the corn.

"The red ears generally come by the old-fashioned boxing, which follows the kiss," said Ruddygore, looking imperturbably droll.

"I know that you are guying me," pouted Bess, a most piquant picture of dismay.

"Indeed I am not, Miss Bessie; I was only wishing that it might fall to my good luck to be able to teach you the story of the red ear on the occasion of the husking."

"You mean that I shall put myself in a position to have my ears boxed by you," gasped Bessie.

"Just the contrary. I am hoping to suffer that delighful scourging at your hands instead."

"I shall have nothing whatever to do with you," said Bessie, very positively, tossing her

jaunty head until its rich love-locks fell about her temples in a shower of gold.

"But you know you can't help it, if I have a red ear," pursued Ruddygore, purposely mystifying her.

"Can I not, Miss Blaine?" pleaded the pretty creature, rather dubiously.

"Certainly you can, if you know how," laughed Margaret, slipping her arm about the girl. "Come with me and I will tell you a secret of a husking that I went to long ago, when I was near your age."

"May I come too?"

"Indeed you may, Madge," replied Margaret, extending her disengaged arm to clasp the waist of the piquant little brunette. And off they went into the purple and orange gloom of the falling twilight, leaving the others to enjoy the crackle and warmth of the roaring wood fire in the great English hall.

Margaret was an excellent recounter of reminiscences. There was a certain magnetic quality in all her stories, even her fairy tales, which she kept ready for stray children, and this escapade of her girlish days was just the

sort to hold the attention of these two half-wild young things, who were even yet lingering between regret for their dolls and delight over their first ball dresses; and they clung to her with little girlish squeezes of delight, generously interposed with "ohs!" and "ahs!" as they sauntered along in the gloaming. But for concentrated interest in the moment, one of the three must have seen the figure of a man coming toward them through the purpling shadows of the glowing evening. As it was, he came quite upon their own approach before they sensed his presence.

All looked up at the same instant, and Margaret felt a pair of deep, intense eyes sinking into her own, out of the glow and gloom; and she saw through the shadows of the past and present that love had at last come into its own kingdom after a weary pilgrimage.

When she reached out her bare, warm hand, to be taken into Yandell's larger, stronger one, the clasp was like the touch of divine ecstasy; and wordlessly from the fulness of their united souls came a grand "Gloria Patria! Amen!"

Each knew that the supreme hour of life had

come—that love had triumphed. Not self-indulgently, but prayerfully; not in reckless defiance of conventional superstitions and customs, but irresistibly compelled to the heights by upsoaring wings—holily, with hearts thrilling to the grand music of the immortal anthem of perfect faith.

But in this exalted crisis of her life, Margaret felt that there would be profanation in the gaze of people; she must for a half-hour at least enjoy the delight and the wonder of her translation into this realm of perfect peace. Yandell understood her wish, which was equally his own, and as soon as politeness would permit, after the exchange of commonplace greetings which his introduction to Madge and Bessie demanded, he said:

"Can we not go back to the Castle with the young ladies? I have so much to tell you, and the evening is so pleasant that we might walk for a half-hour before I meet the colonel and Mrs. Douglas."

"I fancy that the girls will consent," Margaret replied, with one of her caressing

smiles, which seemed to embrace each of them within its tenderness.

"You do not need to go back, it will be all right for us to go alone," said Bessie, quickly, desiring above everything to please Margaret.

But Yandell, with his native courtesy toward all women, young and old, replied: "We can take part of our walk in that way, by returning with you; besides, Miss Blaine must have a wrap."

Margaret laughed a little guiltily.

"It was certainly very careless of me to permit the girls to come out without their garments," she said. "I am afraid that their mammas will not consider me a safe chaperon for an evening's walk unless I am more guarded about their health."

With such inconsequential nothings they retraced their steps to the western entrance, where Bessie ran ahead, returning soon with a long, soft cape for Margaret.

Alone together with the early stars, like the eyes of an approving heavenly host looking down upon their happiness, Yandell's hand

closed over Margaret's, and his voice breathed her name:

"Margaret—Margaret—dear heart."

She nestled close to him, so that their shoulders and arms blended into a perfect current of motion as they walked; and in that delicious silence and poetry of movement, which is more ardently perfect than impassioned speech, time passed unheeded.

"Ought we to return to the castle?" he whispered, at length.

"I suppose so," Margaret breathed, reluctantly.

"I was going to tell you why I came, but I do not think that I can talk to you to-night."

"I understand why you came," Margaret replied, simply. "I have expected you."

"I felt it," he returned, with a firmer pressure upon her hand. "Sometimes you have seemed to call to me out of space like a disembodied soul. But I did not come until I knew that it was *to stay!* We can never go back again to what was. I have come to claim you, Margaret, and hold you against the world; you will not regret it."

She lifted her eyes to his proudly and confidently, and simply answered him :

"No."

"There may be self-denials."

"Impossible with you."

Again he pressed her hand until the fulness of his emotion permitted speech.

"I am not legally free," he replied, with just a touch of bitterness. "I may not ever be able to secure my freedom. Do not misunderstand me, because I hope to do it; but if I do not, it will be the same, we can never part again."

She was looking straight into his heart through his eyes, trustfully, entirely yielding her life to his keeping, wishing with a generous woman's abandon, that she had more to give.

"You are mine, Margaret!" He was almost challenging her. "Mine—in spite of everything."

"Yes."

"To have and to hold you in my heart until death do us part; and afterward, by God's will, as the soul of my immortality.

"Yes."

"Never to turn back, never to regret the world if the world must be sacrificed—forever, Margaret?"

"Forever, Alex."

"God! what have I done to deserve this?"

He lifted his pale face to heaven in the rapture of gratitude, taking a step away from her.

She clasped her dropped hands, interlacing the fingers and pressing the palms together.

"Margaret," he called her, "Margaret, I wonder," huskily, "if you really understand, —do you, little girl?—do you know what you have promised me?"

He held her off from him by his gaze.

"Yes, Alex."

Her voice thrilled and rent him at the same moment.

"Think what it is to give yourself to me! I might wrong you, Margaret; I might—what nonsense I am talking to her!"

"Yes, it is nonsense, Alex," Margaret replied, very simply.

"But the world will say that I have wronged another woman—it will call me a traitor and

a coward, and accuse me of being false, because she was my wife. Margaret, do you realize that?"

"It will be all the same to me."

"Margaret, love! say that again."

His voice was bursting with the pain of pleasure in her loyalty, and the absolutism of the love which he had inspired in her.

"It will be all the same to me, Alex," she repeated, in a sweet, clear voice.

He drew a deep, long breath of intense feeling.

"Margaret! Margaret! Margaret! I believe that you will slay me here and now with pure joy," he said, with his eyes drinking in the exalted beauty of her face, as the light of the young crescent moon revealed it.

She put out her hand, and looked at him almost reproachfully when he simply raised it to his lips.

He understood her.

"Think about it to-night, Margaret, pray over—weigh it and me, and to-morrow—to-morrow, if you still say it, you shall come

to my heart," he whispered, hoarsely, with masterly self-control.

"There will be no to-morrow for you, Alex," she replied, with convincing eagerness. "You came to me because your heart demanded me, and I go to you because mine must have you —that is all! It is not a question of to-day or to-morrow, but of the everlasting truth of love."

She swayed him, she conquered. Opening his arms with intense, ardent invitation, he received her to his heart and held her there, showering warm kisses upon the white brow which lay so temptingly upon his breast.

But she brushed these kisses away with a little piquant gesture of rejection, and laying a soft finger upon her lips, lifted her eyes to his.

CHAPTER XII.

The kiss that sealed the betrothal between Yandell and Margaret was as sacred to them as if both had been free and in the first flush of youth and passion—nay, more so, for it was the expression of the purified essence of suffering turned into joy.

I know that a generation which lifted its voice against a Lewes and a George Eliot may well be expected to condemn Yandell and Margaret Blaine; but in my capacity of biographer, I am compelled to admit that the significance of the world's censure or praise was almost lost upon these two perfected souls. Neither was love a mixed question of indulgence with concealment to them but rather a straightforward challenge.

They loved—and that fact seemed to lift them above the vulgar contagion of lust. They did not hasten to evade or break the

law, nor did they feel called upon to formulate elaborate palliation for what might be regarded by some persons as a half-way crime. To them love was the revealed philosophy of life, to be accepted in a spirit of reverence, and without fear. Had it been less I should doubtless have been called upon to chronicle immediate and sweeping defiance of the accepted laws of conventional morality. As it was, his Jacob was ready to serve his full time before claiming his Rachel.

The next day Yandell and Margaret met with the colonel and Mrs. Douglas in the library. They had thought it the better course to state their position at once and without reserve. Yandell's return had carried its own significance to the colonel and his sister, and both had passed a rather sleepless night. They were, however, prepared to bow to the inevitable.

"You must admit," Yandell was saying, "that we have the right to take such advantage for happiness as the law allows. Divorce has become too common to attract attention; and however a few persons may feel upon

the subject, that the larger part of the men and women of the land are agreed upon legal separation as better than hopeless union is proven by the law covering that point. Had my children lived I should have been compelled to consider them before myself; as it is, my only son is almost a man, and of an age where the consequences of such a step can have no influence upon his life. I believe that I have a right to act without considering him."

"Without raising personal objections to what you propose," the colonel replied, "will not she—Mrs. Yandell—do all in her power to render your freedom impossible?"

"I will be perfectly frank with you, Colonel; I believe that she will. Nay, I am almost certain that every obstacle to be thought of will be thrown in my pathway. I have no reason to suppose that she will be either merciful or just to me. Indeed, urged on by her lawyer, who was a personal friend of her father's, she will make a fight which will be both malicious and damaging."

The colonel looked thoughtful and dis-

tressed, while Yandell continued, with deep, unalterable purpose.

"But I am determined to resist to the end. I have taken this step after considering it in every aspect, and I do not intend to yield my right to freedom—and Margaret."

He reached out and took one of her hands into his own, holding it with a species of moral defiance between his throbbing palms.

"And if you do not succeed?"

"If I do not succeed—" a quiver of impatience thrilled him—"but I must! there is no question about it. The fight may be a long and stubborn one, but it must end in victory."

"Why *must?*" the colonel insisted, with rather depressing intonation. "I will not attempt to conceal from you my own belief that your application for divorce will be refused."

"Refused! upon what ground?" demanded Yandell, a trifle annoyed.

The colonel slowly brushed a fleck of dust from his boot with his handkerchief, then replied with moving candor,

"Because I do not believe that your reasons will be found tenable in law. Although most

annoying in themselves, they are reasons both subtle and intangible to less sensitive minds; and to my way of thinking, the cold, legal summing-up of the Court will amount to just this—'Here is a man who wishes to be freed from his lawful wife because he is in love with another woman and desires to marry her.'"

"Why, Colonel, you do not think that I intend to drag Margaret into the divorce courts?" Yandell exclaimed, with a show of resentment.

"No, you do not; but Mrs. Yandell will. The facts are that I foresee that Margaret will be the choice morsel which she will roll under her tongue with appetizing flavor to scandalize you; and I think it well to prepare you for that disagreeable result."

"It would be damnable!" Yandell burst forth. Then, with quick apology to Mrs. Douglas—"I beg your pardon, but I cannot help feeling that such a step would be unworthy even a fiend."

"And yet I believe that my brother is right," returned Mother Hetty, whose gentle

face looked out from beneath its white crown with a certain benignant anxiety. "It would be the strongest objection that Mrs. Yandell could put in against granting you your freedom, and the most annoying."

Yandell strode up and down the room, until Margaret laid her magnetic, restraining hand upon his arm, saying,

"And what of that? Do we not cast our lives together for better or worse?"

Yandell's hand closed over hers with his characteristic gesture.

"You are a noble woman," he said, with a pressure which had the effect of fine music, sending enthralling rills aplay upon her heart-cords; "but it hurts me like a death wound, to think that she or anyone would dare to flaunt your name suspiciously."

She smiled with that deep, rich indescribable wistfulness which was so distinctly her own.

"Alex, you forget that I am prepared for whatever may come; that I have no fear while you love me."

"But this would seem such a needless con-

tingent that I am almost compelled to reject it," he said, vehemently.

"Yet I am sure that it will be made to serve a double purpose against you," Colonel Conant replied, firmly.

Yandell began again somewhat gloomily,

"For myself I do not care, but for Margaret—"

She interrupted him with a voice of passionate assurance.

"It will be all the same to me," she said, "for all roads will lead to one end—ourselves."

"That is settled," he said, almost fiercely, "and I suppose that there is little use in discussing possible expedients, for we may be sure of the worst. But what must be, must! There was no way but to apply for the divorce and await the consequences."

"Has it never occurred to you, Yandell, that it might have been better to try and effect some sort of arrangement with her by which she would apply for the divorce?" the colonel asked.

"That would have been out of the question.

She is bitterness itself toward me since the incident of the painting, and would listen to nothing. You can judge of the extent of it when I tell you that upon recovering from that miserable, self-inflicted wound, she declared to me that she would willingly have died, to leave me under the suspicion of having been her murderer."

"What a vindictive and unnatural heart she must have!" Margaret replied, shuddering closer to him, as if in protection.

"She has always shown an irritating and unreasoning spirit toward me, which has increased in bitterness all through these later years; but I believe that it has now culminated in absolute hatred. Since that last experience in physical suffering, she has been intolerable. Indeed, I am prepared for anything cruel," he continued, with desperateness—' for anything —except to be stabbed through this dear girl."

Yandell drew Margaret's head to his shoulder tenderly, and pressed the open palm of his strong right hand against her upturned cheek.

"You do not think that she still loves you?" the colonel ventured.

"I do not think that she ever really loved me; she is incapable of it. She felt a certain kind of pride in the fact that I was her husband, and I had a species of coarse physical attraction for her; beyond this she has always been maddeningly jealous and suspicious. It is not an easy matter for me to say this, even to you, Colonel, but justice to myself demands it. The woman has never been a wife to me in a single one of the nameless relations that elevate union into the dignity of marriage. Roy is the only feature of my long bondage that makes the memory endurable."

Yandell's brow grew grave. He sat with thoughtful eyes bent upon space, as if trying to divine what the end of all these miserable complications would be.

The door opened and a servant entered.

"There are two gentlemen in the hall wishing to see Mr. Yandell," he announced.

"Gentlemen to see me!" Yandell exclaimed, starting to his feet. "Their cards."

"They sent no cards, and said that you

would not know their names; at first they insisted upon following me in here."

The colonel and Yandell exchanged quick glances.

"I do not understand who they can be," Yandell said, hurriedly. "I mentioned this trip to no one."

Then, turning to the servant: "Say that I will come at once."

"Rather show them in here," said the colonel, laying a firm hand upon Yandell's shoulder, a certain nervous apprehension in his voice.

The servant bowed and retired.

The two men entered almost immediately. "We are sorry to intrude," began one of them, "but we must do our duty. Which is Mr. Yandell?"

"That is my name," said Yandell, rather haughtily.

The men looked from Margaret to Mrs. Douglas, almost apologetically.

"The ladies—"

"That is all right," said Yandell; "state your business."

And still the man seemed to be covered with a certain embarrassment.

"It is unpleasant business to state in the presence of ladies," he said, "but we must do our duty, sir,"

Yandell bowed coldly.

"We are called upon to serve a warrant for your arrest."

"What!" exclaimed Yandell, in a tone of imperious amazement; while Mrs. Douglas and Margaret both uttered little shocked cries of indignation.

"That is the size of it, sir; you are our prisoner."

The colonel, who was wrought up to a pitch of absolute calmness, came forward with the most elaborate courtesy.

"Begging pardon, gentlemen, but Mr. Yandell is my guest, and your intrusion into this house in the garb of private citizens on such a mission as this, is something that I must demand shall be explained."

The leader of the two threw aside his long coat, displaying the badge of an officer.

"You shall have the explanation, sir; I am

doing no more than my duty, and that as quietly as possible; because it ain't any advantage to us to make a noise about these things. An indictment has been found against this man, who is arrested on the charge of assault with intent to kill."

"Good God!" exclaimed Yandell, with drenched forehead, "was there ever such an infamous outrage perpetrated on an honest man before?"

"Sorry for you, sir! but we ain't judge nor jury; and you'll have to come with us," said the spokesman of the two.

But Margaret flew between the officers and Yandell with eyes ablaze, and the fierce agony of outraged love contorting every feature. She was as dangerous in this mood as a Rizpah protecting the bodies of her sons from the attack of vultures.

"You shall not touch him!" she cried; "this is fiendish!"

"We don't know nothing about that," said the officer. "We've got to do our duty—these gentlemen know that."

Yandell, however, had thrown a strong arm

about Margaret's waist, and he whispered a word in her ear, whereupon she clung to him, sobbing tearlessly; while poor Mother Hetty, a picture of perplexity and despair, sat helplessly turning over the books on the table at her elbow.

The colonel took a few short turns up and down the room, with breath coming in short, hard gusts of conscious impotency.

"We don't want to hurry you, sir, but we had better be getting off, seeing as you have to go with us," said the officer.

Still Margaret clung about Yandell's neck in quivering, piteous misery. It seemed as if her heart was breaking.

The colonel slipped a sum of money unnoticed into the officer's hand, and said in an undertone:

"He will be ready in a few moments."

The men understood, and retired to a corner of the room.

"This charge must have been preferred by your wife," said the colonel to Yandell, in a low voice.

"Yes, it is her work," he replied, with sav-

age emphasis. "It has been done to disgrace me and drag us all through the filth of a newspaper scandal. She can hope to gain nothing by it; it will be easy enough to prove my innocence."

"That is the point! Will it? There were no witnesses to prove; as I understand it, you were alone."

"Yes, we were alone," admitted Yandell, with a rather ghastly sense of the fact that it would be his word against that of his wife, with the balance of the evidence in her favor. Like the sudden summing-up of all the happenings of a lifetime which is said to occur to a drowning person, Yandell recalled the events of that wretched morning; and he saw, as if by a psychic foreshadowing of public opinion, that what had happened to Gerta Yandell was the very last out of a thousand possibilities which would appeal to the matter-of-fact common-sense of a jury as likely to occur by pure accident. The most obtuse man among them would be likely to believe that he had wished her out of the way, and had in a fit of passion, if not cold-bloodedly,

made an attack upon her; and his relations to Margaret would go to prove that theory.

The sweat of irrepressible anguish broke out upon him as he pictured the loathsome and brutal manner in which Margaret's purity and sweetness would be dragged through the newspapers and courts, handled by coarse men on street corners and in hotel lobbies, discussed by sporting men over their wine at the clubs, and society women in their *boudoirs* and *salons*. He shrank from the involuntary picture of her degradation, ignoring the dangers of his own situation in the mental contemplation of the bitterness which she would be made to endure because of himself. The hideousness of the probability that a wink and smothered jeer would follow her footsteps in public places smote upon his heart like the burning touch of the formless, accursed spirit of sin, which carries the blast of hell in its breath. He sank, nerveless and dispirited, upon a sofa, burying his face in his hands, while a quick succession of groans burst from him.

Margaret threw herself upon the floor beside

him, twining an arm over his neck, her face nestled close to his own.

"Darling, darling!" she cried, with appealing love, forgetful of her surroundings. "Alex, darling, do not grieve; everything will come out all right—I know it will! God would not allow evil to triumph so cruelly. You must keep up your faith and courage for my sake, love!—for my sake—for Margaret, Alex!"

Still the dry, anguished sobs shook his frame, as giant trees are shaken in the clutch of a devastating whirlwind.

The colonel was deeply moved. "Come, come, Yandell," he said, rather moistly, "bear up like a man! You will find some way to prove your innocence of this outrageous accusation."

Yandall leaped to his feet.

"Margaret, Margaret, do you think me capable of whimpering like a schoolboy over my own misfortunes. It is hers—Margaret's! What is proving my innocence to saving her from the venomous tongues of sleuth-hounds, who will seek to rend her reputation and fair

fame limb and joint. Oh, if I could save her from all connection with this affair, I would gladly suffer the penalty of any crime that the law might fasten upon me."

His hands were clenched, and great knots like whipcords stood out upon his forehead. A sudden light, like the illumination from the sword-flame of the cherubim set to guard the approach to Eden, up sprang in Margaret's face. For a moment it seemed as if her soul communed with that of an angel of faith and mercy, whose words were molten comfort, showing the way through the miserable labyrinths of hatred and darkness which seemed to hopelessly encompass love.

Margaret reached her two hands to Yandell's shoulders, looking deep into his gloomy eyes, and said, solemnly :

"I believe we shall both come through this ordeal scathless. I do not fear the world. We are in the hands of God. Through error He has led us into light ; through injustice I believe that we may trust Him."

Yandell was moved and comforted by her words. Although not a religious man there

was something infinitely sustaining in her sudden spiritual translations. He caught the spirit of her exalted faith.

"God grant that you may be right, Margaret," he said.

"I must be right. This charge is preposterous! No man in his right mind could believe that you would be capable of such a cowardly act. It does not even seem possible that anyone should suppose that you could *want* her out of the way, when the world is wide enough for all of us. People see such things so strangely," she said, with pathetic conviction.

"They certainly do," Yandell admitted, "but this accusation is so entirely unjust that I believe my faith in the triumph of eternal right is superior to the logic of any developments that I can foresee."

He paused, and looked at Margaret long and steadily.

"You will save me, Margaret. I believe that I could conquer the very Prince of Evil himself while my courage is nerved by your faith and love. Good-bye, dear heart," he

whispered, pressing both of her hands in his, "Good-bye, and God be with you."

He turned away from her quickly to hide the emotion which shook him.

"I am ready," he said to the colonel.

Colonel Conant walked over to the corner to which the officers had discreetly retired, with faces turned away.

"We are ready. I shall go with my friend," he said. "This is a case that admits bail?"

"Certainly," one of the officers replied. "The woman's injuries have not proved fatal —nor they ain't going to."

"No; she is living, and seems likely to live until she has killed everybody else," the colonel replied, grimly.

CHAPTER XIII.

It would perhaps seem needless to state that the full extent of what had happened to Yandell did not come home to Margaret until after he had gone.

At the moment of his arrest, she had sensed nothing but the immediate outrage and injustice of the accusation against him. The possibility that he could really rest under the horrible suspicion of having attempted his wife's life did not appeal to her in the excitement of the moment, and knowing nothing of the workings of criminal law, she honestly believed that he would return to her in a few hours a free man.

But Mrs. Yandell's lawyer had laid his plans too shrewdly for his victim to escape. Yandell was really under a serious cloud, as he and the colonel found out to their horror and indignation when they reached New York.

The demand that Yandell should be admitted to bail was strenuously opposed by his wife's counsel; and the case against him had been worked up so cunningly in advance that it took the most unremitting efforts, together with the liberal use of money, to save him from incarceration in the Tombs.

The colonel did not return to Glenmere, as he felt that Yandell needed the support and sympathy of his presence through his trying ordeal. But he advised Mrs. Douglas and Margaret to remain, thinking it better than for them to come up to their town house.

The newspapers, always on the alert for choice sensations (as indeed it is their business to be, the people demanding it), were ablaze with this latest society scandal. At first Margaret was only hinted at, because nothing was really known about the affair between herself and Yandell by any persons except those most interested to keep her name quiet; but some enterprising reporters got wind of the place where Yandell was arrested, and went down to Glenmere, and by assiduously working the country-folks,

servants, and guests, following the trail of possibility backward for a year through the mazes of change which had characterized Yandell's movements and her own, they presently had a story wrought out which was blood-curdling in its ingenuity and imaginative genius.

Of course sympathy was with the poor, *wronged wife*—whose dearest friends, by the way, would have passed her by without recognizing the newly endowed character for lamb-like, forbearing, long-suffering virtue.

Margaret was the traitorous Delilah who had shorn a Sampson of his moral strength, bringing him to this pass, where he stood before the bar of justice in the character of a would-be murderer. The newspapers paraded pictures with—"The Unscrupulous Woman Who Did It," and other equally exciting comments attached—pictures which carried a grain of comfort to suffering hearts, in the certainty that no one would ever recognize the victim from them.

Clergymen preached whole sermons against the infamous woman who had forced herself

beneath the sacred portals of an ideal home, shattering its gods of love, faith, and virtue as she went, while they drew vivid and highly-colored word-pictures of the wife, whose crown of sainthood had descended ready-made from angels' hands. Moralists wrote double-leaded essays for the journals, in which they exalted the nobility of the wife and the sacredness of her rights, while enforcing the great moral lesson that law is marriage; nor did they lose the golden opportunity to deplore the fact that the tendency of the law-makers is toward multiplying legal means of escape for the unfortunates who find, in bitterness of spirit, that they have entered into the marriage relation without justification.

But neither clergymen nor laymen were found to raise their voices against the pitiable custom which sanctifies loveless union at the altar, depriving helpless, unborn children of their birthright in the world.

What Margaret suffered during this season of moral scourging I need not attempt to describe. It sometimes seemed to her that the very face of a pitying God had been

turned away. Daily and hourly she searched her own soul for the lurking evil which is supposed to be the parent of sorrow, and day by day she saw that her heart was innocent of all criminal intentions toward her fellow-creatures. It was pure as the heart of a child—generous, forgiving, loving, and passionate in its faithfulness, with tears for all misery, and smiles of sympathy for everybody's joy.

Of course the greater part of her suffering was because of Yandell's horrible position as a suspected criminal, and the more she thought about it, the more impossible it seemed to her that a mother, however unloving, should have been able to so accuse the father of her children.

Dwelling upon the matter, Margaret felt herself driven into appealing to Gerta Yandell to be true to the womanly traditions of tenderness and mercy. She would beg her upon bended knees to spare Yandell, if not for his own sake, for that of their dead children. If she had one spark of womanly feeling in her breast, she must be susceptible of being

moved, and Margaret had made up her mind to move her.

Leaving a note for Mother Hetty, she stealthily left Glenmere, and sought Gerta Yandell at her home in New York. It was with the greatest difficulty that she gained admittance to her presence without card or explanation—and the moment was embarrassing beyond words to both.

Mrs. Yandell visibly paled when face to face with the woman to whom she well knew that she owed her life; for it was Margaret's unremitting and desperate devotion which had carried her safely over the dangerous crisis of fever.

But who besides this impulsive, passionate pilgrim of ours would have thought of taking such a step? It was the unexpectedness and surprise of it that affected Gerta Yandell beyond the power of even her phlegmatic nature to control.

"You remember me," Margaret said, by way of introduction. "I have certainly proven myself a friend."

She would have said more, but Mrs. Yan-

dell burst into a mirthless, nervous laugh. "And now you have come to tell me why you did it—I have wondered all along."

Margaret gazed at her in a species of blank surprise.

"No, I have come to talk about other things," she replied. "I am glad that I was able to save your life." It seemed perfectly natural to her to say this, not at all forced or strained; she had not detected the irony of her enemy's position toward her.

"Saved my life! that is rich! I am afraid that you do not read the newspapers, my dear, innocent friend."

Margaret flushed and paled, her breath came feverishly.

"No, I do not read them now—I used to, but not now." She had clasped her hands together, and faltering tears blurred her eyes.

The advantage was with Mrs. Yandell.

"It might be better if you did, you would know then how the world regards your generous efforts to save my life."

Margaret looked at her anxiously for a

moment, then a horrible revulsion of feeling took possession of her.

Mrs. Yandell saw her advantage and cruelly followed it up. She saw that Margaret had caught her meaning, but that did not deter her from saying, with almost sardonic hatred:

"Why did you spare me? Nobody would have known it then—you must be a very baby-hearted creature to turn back at the ninth hour, just the kind of milk-and-water beauty that Yandell would be sure to like. I am not surprised at your influence over him."

Margaret had drawn herself proudly together, and in her towering height and the honest scorn of her beautiful eyes there was something before which even the insolence of Gerta Yandell quailed.

"Madam," Margaret began, quite self-possessed, "I am not here to discuss the motives which took me to your bedside. I did not intend to presume upon your gratitude for any poor service that I have been permitted to render you; I alluded to the matter as an earnest of my disinterested well-wishes toward you. I find myself humiliated and insulted—

not suspected, madam; for you do not *suspect* me of anything—not even of the wish to win your husband from you."

Gerta Yandell writhed uneasily under the steady, magnetic, compelling gaze that Margaret had fastened upon her, and again laughed that irritating, suggestive laugh which had so nearly maddened Yandell through long years of life with her.

Margaret, however, raised an imperious arm, and coming a step nearer with the suppressed passion of outraged dignity, she repeated, "You do not suspect me, madam; you know that I went to you to save your life, that I would have given my own to do it, if necessary, that my heart was single to that thought, no other. You know that, and I know that you know it; therefore all pretence between us is unmeaning."

For a moment Gerta Yandell's ever-ready irony was paralyzed and silenced by the superior force of well-directed truth; and before she had recovered herself, Margaret continued,

"It was you who drove your husband from

you, not I who won him; and God knows that I pity your misfortune, for it was a misfortune not to be able to keep the love of such a man. I can understand your unhappiness, but not your injustice, your inhuman, unwomanly cruelty. That is diabolical! I should think that you would be afraid to be alone with yourself."

In all her life Gerta Yandell had never experienced such a curdling, awesome fascination as Margaret's perfectly serious, low-voiced accusations had for her. She was not a sufficiently sensitive person to be subject to thrills and tremors—even of fear; but she was growing cold and uneasy, superstitiously so, under the concentrated, penetrating gaze which Margaret bent upon her. In the half-light of the shaded reception-room there was something almost supernatural about this pale-faced, towering creature who had once saved her life; it was as if a breath from her would again consign her shrinking soul to helpless trembling upon the verge of an open grave. Margaret herself was thrilling, intoxicated by the annihilating force of conscious justice; every fibre

of her being was wrought up to the pitch of glowing courage; she felt as she had sometimes pictured that she might feel in the sudden presence of a robber, if she were to wake up in the night and find one prowling about her chamber—as if, by rising in spiritual courage and approaching him fearlessly, brute-force must fall before the impalpable sense of the superiority of the indefinable. She had pictured such a wretch, huddled together, begging mercy at her feet; and her determination to conquer Gerta Yandell, so far at least as to compel her to do her husband the justice of withdrawing her unfounded and damning charge against him, operated with the same mesmeric force which often holds a brutal nature in subjection to a spiritual one.

Gerta Yandell undertook a weak defence,—to be silenced again. She said—with a pitiable attempt to recover her usual air of easy, nonchalant sarcasm,

"If it was not to get an expression of my gratitude for your noble service, I am at a loss to know why you have come here."

"No," Margaret replied, perfectly unvary-

ing in her attitude of control, "you are not at a loss, madam. You know that I have come here to urge you to do your husband the justice of withdrawing your infamous charge against him; you know that he did not attempt your life, that the accusation had its foundation in malice and jealousy."

"Let him prove it, then!" Gerta Yandell said, with a very ugly expression. "Let him prove it! It is his word against mine—let him prove it."

Margaret felt her courage faltering, but she rose to the moment with appealing force.

"It is not a question of proof between you and him, but of what you know to be true. You know that he did not attack you—that the accusation is false to the core. For the love of right, and the memory of your children, if you have the instincts of a woman, speak the truth while there is time."

Margaret had become all womanly, supplicating tenderness again; and Gerta Yandell swiftly rallied her spirit of bitter hatred against her and him.

"I will withdraw my accusation," she said,

with a horrible leer, hissing the rest of the sentence from between her strong white teeth, "if you will swear before heaven never to see him again."

Margaret sprang back as if stabbed to the heart, her eyes dilated with sudden, sickening fear. Gerta Yandell had the advantage again, and the curl of her baleful lips grew more and more cruel.

"You see how easily you can save him," she said; "a noble creature like yourself could scarcely refuse so reasonable a request from a wife—the simple request that you will cease your amorous intrigues with her husband."

Margaret stood statue-still, with great, solemn, wide-staring eyes fixed upon the woman's face. "I do not think you are human," she said, slowly, at length, with a species of desperate conviction. "I really do not think you are."

"I am human enough not to pass my husband over to another woman's arms with my blessing, if that is what you mean," continued the pitiless creature.

Margaret silently backed away toward the door.

"What! are you going?"

"Yes, I am going," she replied, very quietly.

"Without saving him—when it is so easy?" sneered her tormentor.

With her superb head poised in infinite dignity, and a mist of pathos mellowing her voice, Margaret replied,

"You misunderstand me, madam; I did not come here to bargain with you to spare your husband. I did not come prepared to offer you a price, but to appeal to you as a woman, humanely, to do him justice; neither more nor less than that! I have failed—and of the rest God must be the judge."

"That all sounds very fine," replied Mrs. Yandell; "but words are cheap. I have made you a fair offer."

"And I have refused it," replied Margaret, still speaking very quietly, "because it would degrade me to accept it just as it does you to offer it." Then, with passionate courage, "If it were in your power or purpose to make your husband a happy man, I would go away

of my own free will—you should not need to ask me! I would go to the uttermost parts of the earth, if by so doing, I could secure him the happiness of life; but I will not bargain with *you*, madam, to lend myself to your cruel purpose to stab him afresh. I have answered you—and now I bid you good-day."

Like a queen she swept from the room, followed by Gerta Yandell's discordant laugh, and the low, hissing words,

"We shall see—we shall see."

CHAPTER XIV.

YANDELL'S trial was the sensation of the hour. People who had never entered a court-room before in their lives were in constant attendance to hear the developments of this surprising story of marital unfaithfulness and crime.

Public opinion had been worked up to fever heat for the wife, and Yandell found himself at the beginning almost without friends. Never did a case open with more odds in favor of the guilty and against the wronged.

The trial dragged along for several days. Servants and unscrupulous people generally were introduced to bolster up the complainant's position, and some most astounding evidence was developed to show that Mrs. Yandell had undergone a long course of cruel neglect and outrageous wrong.

But through all the false and trying details of his wretched situation, Yandell bore himself with a certain dignity which made a favorable impression upon spectators and jury alike, and but a short time elapsed before sympathy began to veer perceptibly in his direction.

Under cross-examination Mrs. Yandell became confused and irritable, and before the case for the prosecution was brought to a close she had broken down utterly, contradicting herself and making a general fiasco of the whole proceeding.

The crowning event of the trial was the testimony given by the brusque old doctor, who had attended Mrs. Yandell at the time of the accident. His statements were terse and characteristic, and his own summing-up, in the profane but honest way he had of putting it, was, that it was a "damned impossibility" for any such an injury as the complainant had sustained to be other than self-inflicted —the effort to fasten an intended crime upon her husband was an "infernal" piece of malice.

The old man grew so violent that he came near being committed for contempt of court. But his rehearsal of the manner in which the toy dagger had been found grasped in the complainant's right hand, made a marked sensation.

The judge's charge to the jury was a string of mild platitudes offered in a half-hearted way. The men, without a leaving their seats, found a verdict of "Not guilty."

Gerta Yandell had played a desperate part, and she had failed—miserably, weakly. Her jealous rage against her husband for bringing an action for divorce had been the incentive to try and fix a crime upon him. Her conventional, selfish soul had shrunk in horror and trembling from being pointed out as a divorced wife, and she felt that the end of all she had lived for would have come when she no longer enjoyed the protection and prestige of the fact that Yandell was her husband.

It was not outraged love, but affrighted pride that had taken umbrage at his act; and to have fixed a miserable suspicion and

the penalty of it upon him would have robbed the situation of half its sting, because popular sympathy would still have been with her. But the misguided woman found too late that justice sometimes rises in majesty to rebuke evil passions. She was a pitiably unhappy woman, and as she stood in the midst of the desolation which she had been slowly bringing down upon herself through long and bitter years, one could not forbear asking—Is not the heart that is suspicious, cruel, and selfish, that sows tares where roses might have been made to bloom, more to be commiserated than despised?

I am sure that Yandell felt it so that memorable hour when he walked forth from the gloom and oppression of the court-room—a free man.

Not even the thought of the probable years of happiness that lay before him could save the bitterness of the recollection, that this woman who had so unjustly degraded him had been his wife, the mother of his children, and the one being from whom he might reasonably have expected sympathy and confidence.

While Yandell looked forward to a future of purest joy with Margaret, the thought of union with her being both holy and satisfying, there was a certain bitter, poignant regret in the fact that the pathway to hope was strewn with shattered ideals and broken faith. The recollection of the miserable, lonely woman whose bitterness had been her own choosing, would always prove a source of sorrow amid his happiest realizations. Cruel, vindictive, selfish, and unreasonable as she had shown herself toward him, Yandell's heart still throbbed with regret and pity, and he would have nothing less than the fullest generosity meted out to the wretched woman who had been his wife, when it came to the question of the settlement of his property.

Roy was taught to believe that his mother was in all ways worthy of his respect and devotion; indeed, his father endeavored to imbue the boy with the idea that the unholy charges against himself had been the result of a misunderstanding, and that the separation was because of mutual differences, which

in no way detracted from the dignity of either.

The next time that Yandell saw Margaret he was a free man legally, no less than morally. It was a clear, beautiful day in early January; the mantle of winter lay over the frozen earth—a newly-fallen mantle of pure and unsullied white, typical of his own pure love. He came to Glenmere—the colonel had not opened his town house for the season—in the dazzling glory of a radiant morning, which set every snow-jewel upon trees and shrubs scintillating and glistening like unto the gleam and splendor of the gems that are set in the golden gates of Paradise.

He left his horse at the lodge below the park, and came walking up to the Castle as if in delicious lingering over the anticipation of Margaret's greeting. The future was so sure to him now, that he purposely prolonged the moments of expectancy, loth to lose a single sensation of love's blissful dream. A light rain had hardened the surface of the snow, and as he walked over the crisp, frozen crust, drawing in long exhilarating breaths of

pure ozone, the memory of all that had gone before, in the first days of their passion, came over him. He recalled the several irresistible midnight meetings between Margaret and himself in this very park, upon occasions when soul and sense had refused to be stilled by the voice of conventional reasoning; he recalled their unhappy separations, when both had believed that an unfathomable abyss of hopelessness divided them; he recalled thoughts, words, looks, hopes, fears, and despair under the trying circumstances of their earlier associations; and most of all, he recalled the fact that there had been neither indulgence nor crime to obtrude its hideousness upon the present exalted hour—and for this, above everything, he thanked Heaven.

There could be no doubt that the love between himself and Margaret must be acceptable to the gods, for it was pure, deep, and abiding as life itself—love which had been sanctified by suffering, proving its right to triumphant fulfilment by bravely conquering all selfish and ignoble promptings. But as Yandell remembered the long years during

which he had stoutly maintained that all divorce was legally and morally wrong, there did come back to him just a twinge of remorse for hasty judgments upon others, who for all he could know, had taken the step, under circumstances justifiable as those governing his own fate.

Love had taught him the divine lesson of charity, and it was a singular coincidence, he remarked mentally, that the little god should have triumphed by virtue of a conquered prejudice which had amounted to bigotry in his earlier years.

The few small "isms" which most of us come to believe in from experience, or lack of it, are apt to constitute the only logic of life which we are ready as individuals to accept; and it sometimes needs a powerful touch upon the hidden springs of the inner being, to set the eternal fountains of sympathy, charity, and justice flowing towards our fellow-creatures.

Yandell's coming had been expected at the Castle for several days, but the day and hour had not been fixed, so that he gave the colonel

and Mrs. Douglas a rather pleasant morning surprise. Both received him fondly, as if he were a returned son, and there were tears of sympathy in the dear old lady's eyes as she welcomed him, for she had learned to regard his splendid manly character with affection and pride

When Margaret came down to the library he was alone, and waiting for her just inside the door. She came in quickly, with the glad joy of love's anticipation on her face.

He opened his arms without a word, the intense longing of his overflowing heart breathing from lips and eyes.

But she simply put her two hands into his, and holding herself off from him at arms-length, searched his face with steady, glowing eyes, which became tremulous with emotion as she looked.

"You have suffered, Alex," she said, with solemn conviction, when she had drunk in every subtle shading of change which time and trouble had wrought on his dearly beloved features and expression. Reaching one of her hands to his snowy locks, she lifted

the heavy mass, allowing her fingers to nestle therein, while she repeated once more, "You have suffered."

"Yes, dear heart," he said, thrillingly, "I have suffered—but that is past. One perfect moment of the present blots out all."

Her fingers were still caressing his hair, and there was a sweetly wistful and serious expression about her mouth.

"I hope so, Alex. I have been thinking about it all for days, and I have thought what a terrible thing it would be if I should fail in making everything up to you. Alex, do you think I can do it? Do you think I can make you forget all that long, dreary past?"

There was a note of anxious beseeching in her tender voice, and eager yearning in the uplifted face.

For answer, the strong man took her to his breast, holding her there with a pressure which was more eloquent than words. All her little womanly misgivings dissolved beneath the intoxicating certainty of his masterful touch. She lay in the delicious

langour of love's rest, with drooped lids and ecstatic heart.

"I will make up for everything—I will, Alex; I love you and I will make you happy, —I will make you happy," she breathed, with soft caressing.

"You have made me deliriously happy, dear heart," he whispered, with moist lips pressed against her pink-tipped ear.

That afternoon a quiet wedding took place at Glenmere. Yandell would brook no delays, but insisted that not a precious hour should be lost before Margaret became his wife. Theirs were not the nuptials for display, for music, guests, and feasting. The usual concomitants of a bridal would have seemed sadly out of place for them. Their supreme wish was to come into the full possession of each other as quickly and quietly as possible. Display and publicity would have seemed unholy and sacrilegious.

Margaret had a fancy that the ceremony should be performed within the ruined east wing, at the consecrated altar, and to this spot, amid the flooding sunshine of the

splendid winter afternoon, the little bridal party of four took their way, followed by servants and retainers. The clergyman met them at the altar, and our beautiful Pilgrim of Passion was united, according to the legal and religious form of marriage, to the man to whom God had long since joined her love and faith.

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